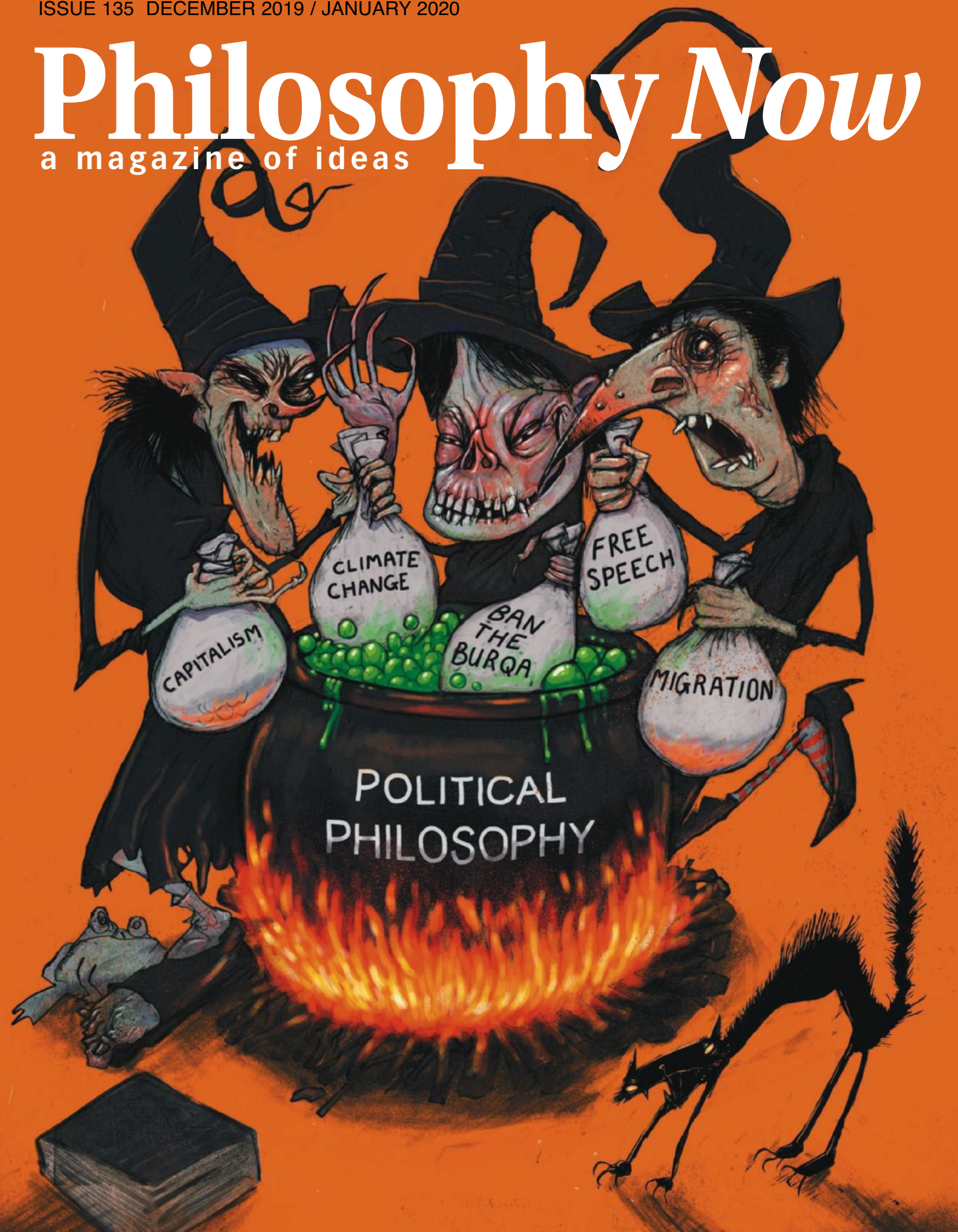


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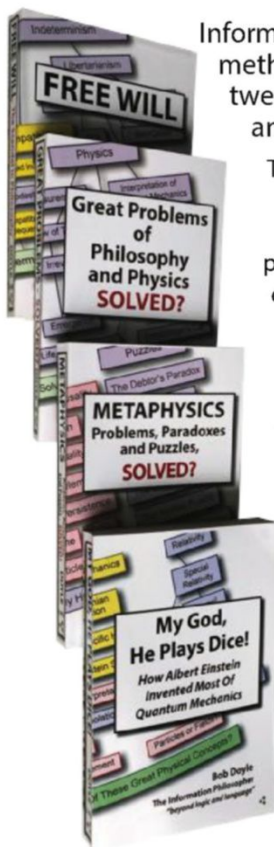
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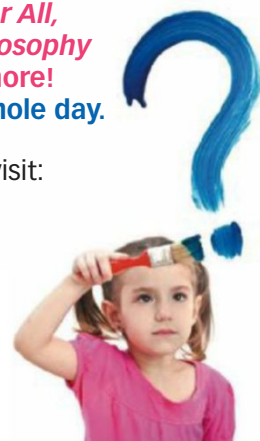
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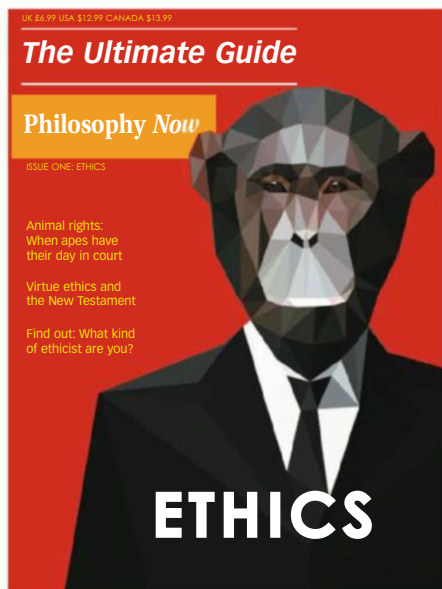
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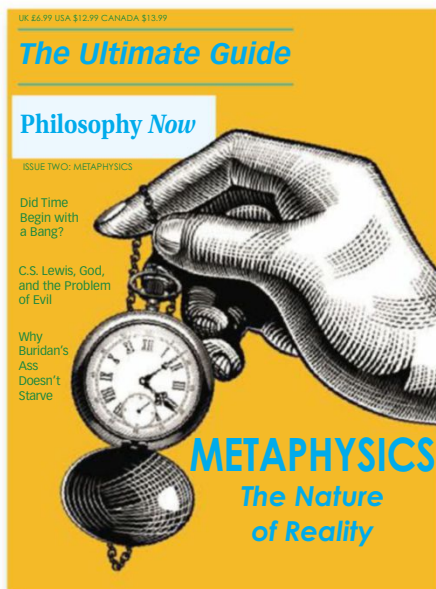
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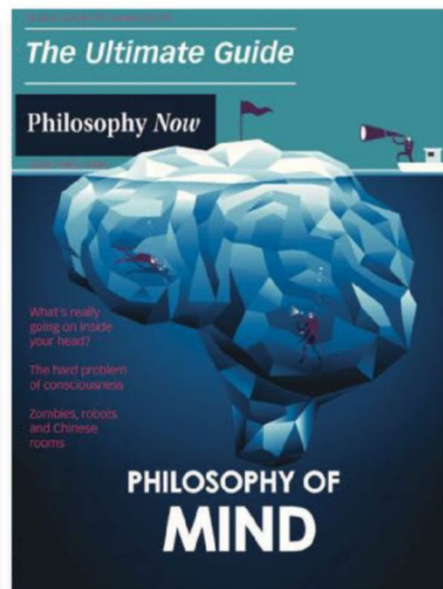
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Philosophy Now,

43a Jerningham Road,

Telegraph Hill,

London SE14 5NQ

United Kingdom

Tel. 020 7639 7314

editors@philosophynow.org

philosophynow.org

Editor-in-Chief Rick Lewis

Editors Grant Bartley, Anja Steinbauer

Digital Editor Bora Dogan

Design Grant Bartley, Tim Beardmore-

Gray, Rick Lewis, Anja Steinbauer

Book Reviews Editor Teresa Britton

Film Editor Thomas Wartenberg

Editorial Assistant Tim Beardmore-

Gray, Madeleine Parr

Marketing Sue Roberts

Administration Ewa Stacey, Tim

Beardmore-Gray, Madeleine Parr

Advertising Team

Jay Sanders, Ellen Stevens

jay.sanders@philosophynow.org

UK Editorial Board

Rick Lewis, Anja Steinbauer,

Bora Dogan, Grant Bartley

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Walter Sinnott-Armstrong

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Estate, St Albans AL3 6PZ

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Intermedia Brand Marketing Ltd

Tel. +44 1293 312001

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Gordon & Gotch Pty

Level 2, 9 Rodborough Road

French's Forest, NSW 2086

Tel. 02 9972 8800

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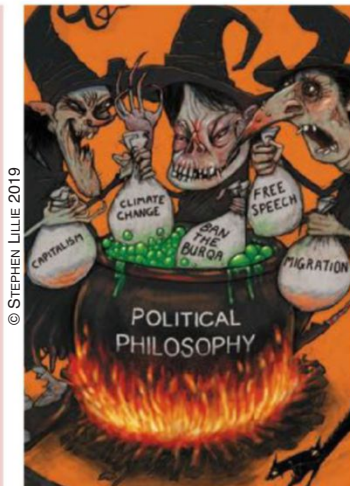
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Rayyan Dabbous constructs a fictional debate from real quotes



Into the Cauldron!

“Politics. noun. From the Greek *poly* meaning ‘many’ and *ticks* meaning ‘blood-sucking insects’.”

Fake dictionary definition, seen on greetings card.

“Would it not in that case be simpler / for the government
To dissolve the people / And elect another?”

From Bertolt Brecht’s poem ‘The Solution’.

I could have easily filled this whole page with more or less witty quotes like the above, all saying essentially the same thing: that you cannot trust politicians and you cannot trust the political process. Increasingly, we’ve come to see politicians as masters of the dark arts, as wizards and warlocks conniving in their covens, stirring trouble for their own ends and expecting us to swallow their vile brew. The good news is that the articles in our political philosophy issue have nothing to say about elections or about any of the individuals and parties pleading pathetically for your favour. Apart, that is, from Peter Adamson’s ‘Philosophy Then’ column, in which he considers whether Machiavelli would have approved of Donald Trump.

Instead, our contributors put forward some philosophical arguments about five contentious political topics: free speech, migration, the global warming debate, the limits of liberalism, and the ethics of discrimination.

Our first article asks if the burqa should be banned by liberal states. You might say it doesn’t matter what clothes people wear, but it makes some people hot under the collar and also enables us to examine a question with far wider applications: what are the proper limits of personal freedom and social regulation in a liberal democracy?

Discrimination on all sorts of dubious grounds was once nearly universal; now it is seen as an evil to guard against. We realise that it doesn’t merely disadvantage people materially but can undermine their self-worth and their very sense of who they are. Frederik Kaufman examines what discrimination is and if there are any circumstances in which it is ever justified.

Our article on free speech is by a philosophy professor who was recently at the heart of a nationwide row in Germany over free expression in universities. The debate about free speech and its limits is crucial because without free speech, progress of many kinds is impossible. Free speech is a fundamental right, some have argued, because speech itself is such a basic human activity that restricting it is like restricting access to oxygen. These days most of us are strongly in favour of free speech – for people who think like us!

Global warming is a problem which, unless tackled now, really might be the end of the world. Is it true that, as Wendy

Lynne Lee argues, denying human responsibility for global warming is fundamentally linked to a capitalist worldview?

Finally, the debate over migration – made acute by the Syrian refugee crisis – has helped to drive political upheavals in the USA, South Africa and numerous parts of Europe. What is the right way to respond?

Many of these five issues interact with each other and with further factors. Put them all into the seething cauldron of current politics, stir briskly and the result is a heady, pungent witches’ brew. Welcome to the modern world.

You may have noticed that politics can be frustrating. You might feel you’ve had enough of it for the time being. A point often made about philosophy is that philosophical problems often confront us all in our daily lives; they are unavoidable and the only question is whether we tackle them badly or well. You could say exactly the same about politics. Sometimes choices have to be made, and even refusing to make a choice is itself a choice. If you are part of the electorate in a democracy then you are in power all the time and no election can remove you. I’m afraid that means you are always on duty! How lucky that we are able to elect representatives to do some of the worrying for us. Maybe they are useful after all.

Can philosophy help? It seems to me that it can’t usually provide definitive answers to political questions, because political choices are about both facts and values. Facts are checkable and are the same for everyone, though they may be difficult to obtain. Values, though, differ and your personal values will help determine your personal political choices. Still, political philosophy can map out the decision-space and clarify the options.

Philosophy also promotes some good habits which can help when participating in political discussions. In arguing against a position you should not rely on attacking the integrity, competence, personal morality or sanity of the holders of that position; nor should you argue against the weakest, most flawed version of the position that you can find. You should argue against the *strongest* version you can find. You should even try to help your opponents to formulate an even better version of their argument and *then* argue against it. This way, if you win the argument anyway, your victory will be all the more glorious. And if you end up being convinced by the argument that you were opposing, well that is good too.

So here are five interesting arguments from political philosophers. We don’t necessarily agree with them all. If for some odd reason you want to know the political opinions of the *Philosophy Now* editorial team, you’ll just have to buy us a beer.

- This month's prizes!
- News from the dawn of time
- Google to be renamed 'Skynet'?

News reports by Anja Steinbauer



Philosophy Awards 1: Lisa Herzog

The Max Uwe Redler Foundation in Germany has named Lisa Herzog as winner of its Award for Philosophy and Social Ethics. The award is a coveted recognition for academics who relate philosophy to the position of the individual in society, consider social structures and enquire into the values of our actions.

Hamburg businessman Max Uwe Redler, who died in 2006, believed in the importance of philosophy in making a difference to our world and specifically the conditions under which we live. The biannual Award is a marker of this conviction. Herzog, who is a professor of philosophy at the Technical University Munich, focuses in her research on the overlap between philosophy and economics, exploring issues concerning the nature of labour, distributive justice and the status of economic institutions. Her book *Reclaiming the System: Moral Responsibility, Divided Labour, and the Role of Organizations in Society* offers a new interpretation of the way we live, work and interact and considers how hierarchies and structures affect our social and economic lives. Herzog says she will spend the handsome award sum of 100,000 euros ~~on a Porsche~~ on more research in her field.

Philosophy Awards 2: Ruth Bader Ginsberg

Philosophy occasionally uses language that sounds like it has been borrowed from lawyers. Kant wrote a *Critique of Judgment* and Wittgenstein argued that "the world is all that is the case." Now a prestigious prize normally given to philosophy professors has been awarded to a Supreme Court justice. Ruth Bader Ginsberg, known to rappers as 'The Notorious RBG,' has been named winner of the Berggruen Prize for Philosophy and Culture. The annual prize, worth a million dollars, honours "thinkers whose ideas have helped us find direction, wisdom, and improved self-understanding in a world being rapidly transformed

by profound social, technological, political, cultural, and economic change." Ginsberg's life and career, her contributions to furthering social justice and human equality, fit this description perfectly. Feminist pioneer, ardent advocate of women's rights, gender equality and civil liberties, Ginsberg, a cancer survivor, is as passionate a defender of justice as she has ever been.

Philosophy Awards 3: Who Do You Think?

In purely financial terms, *Philosophy Now's* Award For Contributions in the Fight Against Stupidity (philosophynow.org/award) is a poor cousin of the rich prizes in the two preceding news items. All we can offer our winner are a book token and a perspex trophy. Still, winners in previous years have included Mary Midgley, Peter Singer and Noam Chomsky. Our 2020 Award ceremony is scheduled for the *Philosophy Now* Festival on 18 January 2020 (philosophynow.org/festival), an all-day philosophy extravaganza at Conway Hall in Central London. May we remind you that we accept suggestions for worthy candidates throughout the year. Your nominations are always welcome, and we hope to see you at the Festival.

News From Prehistory 1

What made us human? A recent discovery may fill in one more piece of that vast puzzle. One key characteristic of humanity is our ability to walk upright. By freeing our front paws for complex tasks this has enabled all sorts of other advances. Fossils of a newly-discovered ancient ape provide new evidence of when and how this ability to stand upright first came about. Analysis of the fossils found near Pforzen in Bavaria, suggests the answers are: 11.6 million years ago, standing on branches in trees. Prof Madelaine Böhme from the University of Tübingen believes the ape, which has been named *Danuvius guggenmosi*, could provide one of the 'missing links' between humans and apes.

News From Prehistory 2

A study published in *Nature* indicates that all humans alive today can ultimately trace their ancestry to an area south of the Zambezi basin in northern Botswana. The area, now mainly salt pans, was once dominated by an enormous lake. A combination of genetics, geology and computer simulations of climate models allowed scientists to imagine what the African continent might have been like 200,000 years ago. This, according to the study, is when our ancestors lived there. The conclusion mainly relies on tracing back the human genetic tree using hundreds of samples of mitochondrial DNA, the scrap of DNA passed down the maternal line, from living Africans. Prof Vanessa Hayes, a geneticist at the Garvan Institute of Medical Research in Australia explains: "We observed significant genetic divergence in the modern humans' earliest maternal sub-lineages, that indicates our ancestors migrated out of the homeland between 130 and 110 thousand years ago."

Autonomous Killer Robots

Last year thousands of workers at Google protested at being asked to work on Project Maven (since cancelled) which aimed to use machine learning to improve the ability of US military drones to identify their own targets. Software engineer Laura Nolan also resigned and has founded TechWontBuildIt Dublin, an organisation for technology workers concerned about the ethical implications of their work. She recently joined the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots and has briefed UN officials about the threats posed by autonomous weapons. She argues that killer robots not directly controlled by humans should be outlawed by the type of international treaty that already bans chemical weapons. She told *The Guardian*: "There could be large-scale accidents because these things will start to behave in unexpected ways. Which is why any advanced weapons systems should be subject to meaningful human control, otherwise they have to be banned because they are far too unpredictable and dangerous."

Should a Liberal State Ban the Burqa?

Brandon Robshaw wonders what the attitude of liberal states should be towards face coverings for women.

Some years ago I was teaching a Philosophy A-level class at a Sixth Form college [16-18-year-olds, for all the non-Brits, Ed], when a student entered in a long black robe with her face hidden behind a niqab, leaving only a narrow aperture for her eyes to peep through. I was taken aback. This student, it seemed to me, simply wasn't playing by the rules. If any other student had appeared with their face covered – say by a scarf or balaclava – I would have asked them to remove it.

And yet... the niqab is a religious garment, and one feels a certain sensitivity about interfering with religious obligations. As it happened, we were beginning that term with a module on the value of tolerance, and here was a golden opportunity to practise what I preached. John Stuart Mill's famous 'Harm Principle' (the idea that the only justification for restricting other people's freedom is to prevent them doing harm to others) appeared to apply. The student wasn't harming anyone in any way that I could see. So I said nothing, and the lesson proceeded.

And yet. Thinking it over afterwards, it seemed that there were the makings of a problem here. The student's choice to cover her face made communication difficult (unsurprisingly, since that is what burqas and niqabs are for). In a philosophy discussion, facial expressions are important. As a teacher you can see the perplexed frown, the dawning of comprehension, the half-formed objection visible in the face. (Bertrand Russell famously said that when he was lecturing at Cambridge he knew that the young Wittgenstein was the only student who understood him since he was the only one who looked puzzled.) These visual clues were rendered impossible by the niqab – and this affected not just me but the other students too.

I asked the college management if we had a rule about face-covering in class. We didn't, I was told; and we weren't going to have one either. It was a diversity issue. The college didn't want to discriminate against any cultural or religious groups. I could see the force of that. And with only a single student with an invisible face, the whole class wasn't going to be derailed. And yet... what if not just one, but six or eight or twelve students turned up with their faces covered? Communication difficulties would multiply to the extent that whole-class discussions and groupwork would become near-impossible; and there would be problems of identification, too.

It was about this time (2010) that the Sarkozy government in France passed the law banning the wearing of burqas and niqabs in public places. This seemed to me a step too far. In certain situations where communication, identification, or security are at issue, it might be legitimate to require the temporary removal of face-coverings – but a blanket ban, in which people couldn't even walk down the street, wait for a bus, or

pop out to the shops in a burqa? Neither the *laissez-faire* approach of my college nor the *laissez-pas-faire* crackdown of the French government seemed to get it quite right.

So I decided to study the question for myself. I enrolled for a PhD with the thesis title 'Should A Liberal State Ban The Burqa?' I want to share some of my research and conclusions with you. What follows is necessarily a brief overview. There isn't space to discuss such issues as the value of personal autonomy, adaptive preferences, or competing theories of multiculturalism. But in broad outline this will be true to the position I arrived at. I'll use *burqa* as a generic term to include both the burqa proper – an enveloping one-piece garment worn by Muslim women (more accurately, Wahhabist women) which covers the face, and which in some versions covers the eyes with gauze – and the niqab – a face veil which leaves a slit for the eyes and is usually worn with a headscarf and a long robe. Both garments are worn primarily for religious reasons, although they may also be worn for cultural or political reasons. Both come under my remit as both conceal the face. Garments which cover only the hair, such as the hijab, are not relevant to my question, and indeed, don't seem to me problematic in any way.

What Is A Liberal State?

'Liberal' is an equivocal term in political philosophy. One can be a classical liberal, a political liberal, an egalitarian liberal, a perfectionist liberal... I'll use the word in a broad sense which would encompass all the competing conceptions. So, briefly, a liberal state is one in which all citizens are free and equal in terms of rights, and freedom is as wide as it can be, consistent with not infringing the freedoms of others.

The burqa poses a dilemma for liberalism which it does not pose for other political positions. 'Should a theocratic state ban the burqa?', for example, is not an interesting question, as the answer simply depends on what kind of theocracy. If it is an Islamic, Salafist theocracy, then of course not. If it is a fundamentalist Christian or Hindu theocracy, then of course. Similarly, for 'Should a (non-Islamic) conservative state ban the burqa?', the answer would likely be yes, on the grounds that burqa-wearing would not be in line with the culture, history, and traditions of such a nation, and conservatives by definition value and defend their culture, history, and traditions. Whether a Marxist (or self-styled Marxist) state should ban the burqa is more of a moot point. Marxist ideology does not entail a specific commitment to religious tolerance, and the burqa does not appear to advance the cause of the class struggle or of economic equality, so there is no principled reason why it should *not* ban it. Probably whether a Marxist state banned it or not would

depend on expediency rather than principle. In most cases, then, simply naming the type of state gives a strong clue to the line that state would take on the burqa.

But for a liberal state the issue is less clear-cut. The burqa is a religious symbol, and is perceived by many if not most of those who wear it as a religious obligation. Liberalism entails a strong commitment to religious tolerance: that's where the whole tradition of western liberalism began. Religious freedom is a cornerstone of liberal rights, and liberals are bound to take seriously any threat to it. On the other hand, liberalism also entails a commitment to equality, including gender equality. The fact that the burqa is worn only by women and could impose disadvantages on the wearer, looks like a cause for liberal concern. There is also the issue of the impact that covering one's face in public may have on other members of society. The issue thus highlights a tension between important liberal principles.

Taking The Agenda Out Of It

I quickly found that much of the material written on this question was journalism at a polemical level, more concerned with calling out the presumed agenda of the opposing side than considering their arguments in good faith.

This seems to me an ineffective and deeply unphilosophical way to proceed. If someone offers arguments why the burqa should be banned, you can call them an Islamophobe if you like – you might even be right – but you haven't engaged with their arguments. Even if the arguments are advanced without sincerity, they still need to be judged on their merits. Someone else who decidedly *wasn't* an Islamophobe could come along and advance the same arguments, and then what could you say?

The French ban followed a specially-commissioned 650-page report, including interviews with philosophers, lawyers, anthropologists, sociologists, Islamic scholars, and representatives of feminist groups. The report was full of arguments, ideas, evidence, provisos, outlines of positions, and critiques of those positions. As it happens, I think its conclusion in favour of a general ban was mistaken. But to dismiss it as mere anti-Muslim prejudice is intellectually lazy. Equally, to assume that to oppose a ban is 'pro-Muslim' – ignor-

ing the fact that Muslims themselves have differing views on the question – is also avoiding discussing the actual reasons why a ban might or might not be justified. For my PhD I decided, therefore, to consider the question at an abstract or depoliticised level and not try to second-guess the hidden agenda behind any particular view. As T.S. Eliot said, it is always possible to do the right deed for the wrong reasons: but that does not entail that there are no right reasons. Throughout my research I took the line that arguments were to be received, debated, and evaluated in good faith.

The Prima Facie Liberal Position On Face Covering

Suppose we suspend thinking of burqa-wearing as a religious or cultural practice, and treat it simply as voluntary habitual public face-covering. Obviously liberals would be against *coerced* face-covering: that would be an infringement of personal liberty. But voluntary face-covering is an *expression* of personal liberty. Is there any reason why a liberal state should ban voluntary habitual public face-covering?

Such a practice *would* occasionally cause difficulties, in situations where communication, security, or identification were paramount – such as in law courts, classrooms, airports, driving tests, or public examinations. In some of these cases alter-

native arrangements could be made to facilitate communication or identification. Where that is not possible, mandatory temporary removal of the face covering would seem a neater, more precise, better targeted solution than a blanket ban. The *prima facie* liberal position on voluntary habitual face-covering, then, would generally be to allow it, with exceptions for specific circumstances. One does not need to invoke arguments about religious tolerance or multicultural recognition to understand this position. Indeed, the question is whether adding in the specifics – namely, the fact that burqa-wearing is a religious/cultural practice, practised only by women, never by men – should make any difference to that basic position.

Three Reasons For A Ban

The French government offered three reasons for their ban: respecting human dignity, furthering gender equality, and fulfilling the requirement of living together (*vivre ensemble*). These reasons broadly correspond to the French revolutionary principles of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

In 2014 the French ban was contested by a French citizen known only as 'S.A.S.'. The case went to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). By fifteen votes to two, the court upheld the ban as legal. Not for all three reasons, however. In fact only one of the reasons



PROTEST AGAINST 'SAY NO TO BURQAS' © NEWTOWN GRAFITTI. CC-BY-2.0

carried the day. The court found in favour of the French state because the ban was motivated by the requirement of *vivre ensemble*, which is linked to the legitimate aim of ‘the protection of rights and freedoms of others’. But the other stated aims, of furthering gender equality and respecting women’s dignity, were not accepted as justifications for the ban. Let’s look at these three reasons briefly.

Human Dignity

The human dignity argument proceeds from the assumption that it is demeaning to cover one’s face: it renders one invisible, marginalised, unable to participate as an equal in social interactions, and debarred from any form of public career. Perhaps this is true, or partly true, or sometimes true. But what if an individual *chooses* to be invisible and marginalised, as far as the public or social sphere is concerned? We might note that monks and nuns who join enclosed orders also thereby retreat from public life, and nobody is suggesting that they should not be allowed to do so.

The whole point about liberal states is that they are *pluralist*. It is not for the liberal state to lay down which kind of lifestyles are compatible with dignity and which are not. That would be unacceptably paternalistic, and, indeed, illiberal.

Gender Equality

The argument from gender equality seems to me more potent. Political equality of citizens regardless of gender is a fundamental liberal principle. And there is no doubt that habitual public face-covering does disadvantage the individual in a variety of ways. But – as the ECHR pointed out – as long as the practice is voluntary, freely adopted, and defended by the women concerned, then the state has no right to ban it. To do so would ride roughshod over the very rights and freedoms it is duty-bound to protect.

Liberals do of course believe in gender equality, and wish to enable, promote and safeguard it. This entails a commitment to preventing unfair discrimination against women, providing legal protection against coercive behaviour towards them by men (or other women), and ensuring that women are well-informed about their rights. But liberals also do not believe that equal outcomes are to be *imposed*. If a woman *freely chooses* to occupy the domestic sphere almost exclusively, or to be deferent and obedient to her husband, then that is no concern of the liberal state.

Vivre Ensemble

The *vivre ensemble* defence is qualitatively different from the other two reasons as it focuses not on the effects on the wearer, but its effects on others. And it was for this reason that the ban was accepted by the ECHR. In its ruling it said:

“The Court is therefore able to accept that the barrier raised against others by a veil concealing the face is perceived by the respondent State as breaching the right of others to live in a space of socialisation which makes living together easier.”

This view is in line with the French republican tradition, which stresses the duties of citizens to the state.

A more liberal view, with greater emphasis on the freedom of the individual, would note first that *many* things are needed for people to live together – to form interpersonal relation-

ships, and for strangers to meet in the public sphere and perform transactions together with ease and trust: politeness, smiles, good manners, handshakes, expressions of thanks, a degree of concealment of true feelings, a common language, and so on – but these requirements would lose much of their value if legally enforced. Since liberals generally highly value personal autonomy, they would to that degree incline to the view that it is up to the individual how open they are to others in the public sphere: individuals must be legally allowed to be shy, private, uncommunicative, even rude and misanthropic in their daily dealings with others (to a certain extent at least); or indeed, to reject society altogether for the life of a hermit.

The Problem Of Coercion

So far we’ve assumed that burqa-wearing is voluntary. The picture would be different if burqa-wearing is to a significant degree coerced. Then the liberal state would have a duty to intervene, since forcing somebody to cover her face against her will would be a serious infringement of her liberty, and indeed, a serious harm to her.

Of course, we cannot really tell to what extent such coercion is occurring. Perhaps it isn’t at all. But if there were good reason to think it were occurring, the liberal state ought to do something. But what? A general ban on burqa-wearing could lead to undesired consequences, leaving the coerced women worse off. Suppose for instance a woman is oppressed by her husband and/or male relatives to the extent that they refuse to let her out in public if her face is uncovered. In that case if face-covering is banned she finds herself under effective house arrest: she is then *more* oppressed than before. A softer or more tactical approach than an outright ban would possibly prove more efficacious in ending coerced burqa-wearing, and more liberating to the women involved. I am reminded here of Aesop’s fable about the sun and the wind arguing about who is the more powerful. To put the matter to the test, they decide to see who can force a traveller to remove his cloak. The wind tries first, and furiously buffets the man about, trying to rip the cloak off him; but the man simply clutches it tighter to his body. Then it’s the sun’s turn. The sun beams down, warming the man until he voluntarily takes off his cloak.

The analogy is not exact. In cases of coercion it is not the women themselves who can choose to remove their burqa, but their husbands or male relatives who must permit them to do so. Nevertheless, the gentle sun of tolerance might be the most effective way of getting those men to relent. At the same time the liberal state could require removal of the burqa when the situation demanded – in schools, airports, banks, law courts, etc. In this way the burqa might come to be seen as a garment one slips on and off rather than a permanent barrier between the wearer and the world; and the task of dissuading men from forcing their wives or daughters to wear one might become easier, as the stakes would be less high. Such an approach would not create problems where none need exist. And it could help in dealing with the problem of invisible students.

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Brandon Robshaw lectures in Philosophy for the Open University. His book, *Should a Liberal State Ban the Burqa?* will be published by Bloomsbury in May 2020. He is also the author of a philosophical YA novel, *The Infinite Powers of Adam Gowers*.

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The Ethics of Discrimination

Frederik Kaufman asks what is and is not discrimination.

The concept of discrimination plays roughly the same role in public debate as the concept of terrorism. In just the same way as disliked militants are often condemned as ‘terrorists’, so disliked policies that differentiate among people are often condemned as ‘discrimination’. Those charges have deep rhetorical power. However, both concepts remain woefully unanalyzed. In this article I want to analyze the concept of discrimination: what it is, and what it isn’t.

Differentiating among people on account of their group membership, disadvantaging some and not others, is not the problem with discrimination. We don’t discriminate against criminals by burdening them with jail. It is when disadvantages are *unjustly* imposed because of group membership that differentiation between groups is morally objectionable. This is what we call discrimination.

Intentionally disadvantaging innocent people merely because of their group membership is the clearest form of discrimination. (Perhaps people can also be discriminated against unintentionally, but that likely originally derives from intentionally disadvantaging members of that group.) Doing so strikes at the core of how we think people should be treated. Basic respect for persons entails regarding them as individuals with a right to equal consideration, not just judging them according to others with whom they happen to be grouped. So it might seem that

disadvantaging someone for that reason is necessarily wrong.

We sometimes do intentionally disadvantage innocent people based solely on group membership, in cases where it does not seem wrong to do so. Airline pilots must retire at a certain age. You must be at least eighteen to vote. When one can get married, drink alcohol, join the military, or sign contracts, are similarly restricted. Insurance rates are established by group membership, not by individual characteristics. Of course, these are not the sort of groups commonly recognized as being *victims* of discrimination. But the salient point is that sometimes there are good reasons to sort and burden people merely because of their group membership. So how do we tell when group membership is a good reason to burden someone, and when it isn’t?

Take ten year olds. Not all ten year olds lack the maturity, judgment and experience to drive or vote, but the odds are that any individual among them does. It’s a matter of probabilities. Given that we can’t easily test every ten year old, restricting their rights solely on account of their age seems reasonable. So there is a plausible connection in this case between group membership and why a particular burden is imposed. By contrast, if someone’s group membership is *irrelevant* to why they’re being disadvantaged, that seems a *bad* reason. If a bus company refuses to hire black people just because they’re black, this is a bad reason because skin color is irrelevant to bus driving. Gender, race,

religion, sexual orientation, and national origin, are all similarly irrelevant to bus driving, too.

Digging Deeper

Disadvantaging people when their group membership is irrelevant appears to explain both what discrimination is, and why it is wrong. However, this account of discrimination is still uninformative because it doesn't address the question of what *counts* as an irrelevant reason. Or I could say that everybody, including discriminators, agrees that we should impose burdens for relevant reasons only. We just disagree about what counts as a relevant reason. In a racist community, for example, skin color becomes terribly relevant. So the 'irrelevant reason' account of discrimination is still too abstract. It doesn't explain what is distinctively morally problematic about discrimination.

We might think that discrimination is objectionable because it disadvantages people on account of an immutable characteristic – some aspect of themselves that they cannot change. This ignores the fact that we can also discriminate against people for things they can change. Even if people could change their sexual orientation, by, say, taking a pill, it would still be wrong to discriminate against gays. Moreover, if discrimination is wrong because it disadvantages people for features they cannot change, this suggests that that feature is somehow objectionable. It gives the impression that if they could change it they should, but since they cannot, it is wrong to disadvantage them for, as it were, being stuck with something they can't do anything about. However, it is not the case that it is wrong to discriminate against a woman *because* she cannot change her gender (sex-change operations aside). Whether or not she can change gender is beside the point.

Perhaps discrimination is wrong because it violates an intuitively obvious principle of justice – that we should treat likes alike. Since all humans share their humanity, all humans should be treated alike. The formal notion that 'we should treat like cases alike' is unassailable; but as with the 'irrelevant reason' account of discrimination, this idea is also uninformative, since the question of what counts as a 'relevant difference' resurfaces. The discriminator readily agrees that he should treat like cases alike: he just regards features such as skin color, gender, etc as differences sufficient to make the people involved not alike.



Clearly, thinking that a difference among people is relevant does not make it so. Even the discriminator knows that. Indeed, it would be unintelligible to disadvantage, say, black people, *just because* they are black; or to treat women worse than men *just because* they are women. Even discriminators understand that treating people disadvantageously *solely* because of skin color or gender etc is as incomprehensible as doing so just because of the number of letters in their names. Rather, the discriminator takes another step: he regards the trait in question as a marker for some *other* relevantly objectionable feature, such as incompetence, untrustworthiness, or inferior moral status. For this reason, the discriminator believes he does no wrong by imposing comparative disadvantages on people because of their group membership. In fact, he thinks he's treating people as they deserve because of their group membership because of this negative feature that he associates with that group membership.

We tend to overlook the rationality that intentional discrimination requires and psychoanalyze instead: 'homophobic', 'prejudiced', 'biased', 'bigoted', 'selfish', 'hateful', and similar diagnostic terms come to mind. But such *ad hominem* critiques fail to address the discriminator or his discrimination perceptively, since he would deny he's doing anything wrong. He thinks he acts justifiably. He thinks that he's doing the same thing we do when we prohibit ten-year-old kids from driving or voting, or when we restrict application to the military to those under thirty, or, indeed, when we shun a bar in a high crime area of town late at night – that is, when there actually is some good reason for disadvantaging someone solely on account of group membership. We might regret that, as a practical matter, we cannot test all ten-year-olds to see who can drive safely or is mature enough to marry, vote, or sign a contract. But just as we think we're justified in prohibiting all ten-year-olds from driving, so the discriminator thinks he is justified in disadvantaging women, black people, homosexuals, Jews, etc, since being a member of one of the groups he excludes means having some further objectionable feature or defect that justifies the treatment – even though he might concede that there will be a few individual exceptions.

Achieving Accurate Stereo Vision

When called upon to justify (even to himself) the burdens a discriminator imposes on people because of their group membership, he must appeal to an alleged fact that, if correct, would indeed justify the disadvantageous treatment. Were this not the case, the discriminator could not even understand his own actions. That is, since the discriminator imposes disadvantages intentionally, he has to know why he is doing so. However, since the discriminator is mistaken about the facts and judgments (moral or otherwise), he harms people mistakenly, and therefore unjustifiably. They do not deserve his maltreatment. This is why discrimination is wrong.

Stereotypes are generalizations which can be more or less accurate; in fact the difference between prohibiting all ten-year-olds from driving and unethical discrimination turns on the difference between accurate and misinformed stereotypes of the salient groups. If black people really did spread dangerous diseases in the community swimming pool, that would be a good reason to exclude them; if many homosexuals really did sexually exploit



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children, that would be a good reason not to allow them to be teachers; if most immigrants really were rapists and drug dealers, that would be a good reason to keep them out of the country; and if women really were incapable of making good judgments, then that would be a good reason not to, for instance, let them drive.

Inaccurate but firmly embraced stereotypes or faulty judgments are not easily corrected by facts or argumentation – although in theory they *should* be, since the discriminator takes himself to be rational. However, since discriminators embrace defective views regarding the people against whom they discriminate, despite good reasons to the contrary, they are now subject to a second kind of moral criticism. How we form and maintain our beliefs is itself a moral issue because what we believe affects others, and because believing contrary to good evidence and arguments is beneath our dignity as rational deliberators.

Have I perhaps over-intellectualized discrimination? Maybe it's just a groundless, free-standing hatred or dislike for people in a particular social group. But if I hate, am disgusted by, fear, or disdain, I must have corresponding beliefs about the object of my emotions. I must think that the object of my hate or disgust merits my opprobrium; if I am afraid, I must believe that the object of my fear can harm me. So when discriminators are simply urged to abandon their hate, fear, etc, they no doubt find the advice question-begging: Why

abandon emotions I rightfully hold?

No. The real issue for discriminators is whether the disadvantages they impose on account of group membership are warranted; and that turns on the validity of their beliefs about the target group.

But what if the disadvantage is based on statistically verifiable facts? Employers favor non-smokers because they are sick less often than smokers; low income drug addicts are more liable to be petty criminals; skin-heads are more prone to violence; the guy with the rebel flag on his pickup truck is more likely to be a racist; people who drive Priuses are more likely to be political liberals; and so on. With stereotypes which have some basis in the facts, the odds are that any individual in the group will have or lack the trait in question. Most women lack the upper body strength to be firefighters. But some *do* have it. Most ten-year-olds are not capable of being good drivers. But some *are*. If we disadvantage someone because of a statistically-correct group norm, but who nevertheless is an exception to the norm, we treat that person unfairly. That person does not deserve the burden we impose, even if others in the group do.

However, this is different from imposing burdens on individuals because of false beliefs or incorrect judgments about the group. If we disadvantage someone who is an exception in a stereotype with some basis in fact, it seems to me not discriminatory. It is *unfair*; and we should try to address unfairness if we can. But not all

unfairness counts as discrimination. Discrimination is a particular *kind* of unfairness, which turns on imposing burdens because of *factually misinformed stereotypes*.

We can also wonder why certain stereotypes have *become* somewhat accurate. If prior discrimination *produced* a stereotype with some basis in fact – such as disadvantaging immigrants leading to greater poverty among them, leading to higher crime rates – it hardly seems fair to appeal to the stereotype as grounds for further disadvantaging members of that group.

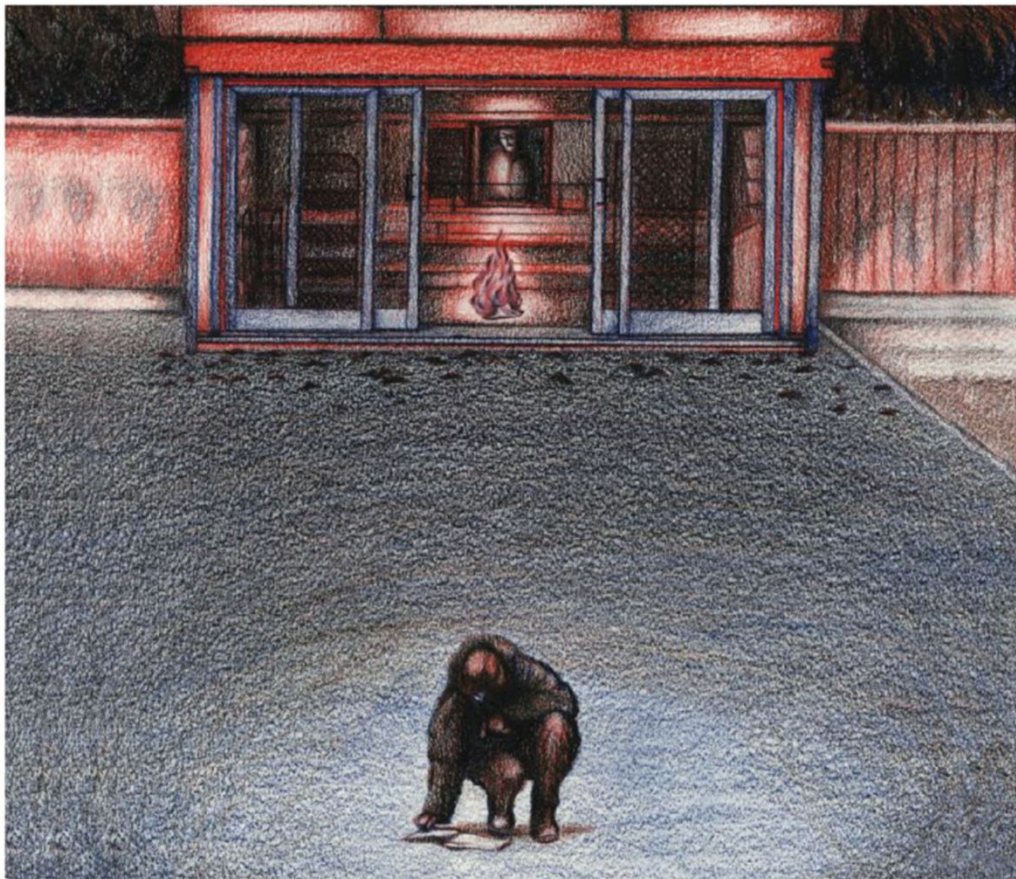
Let's say discrimination involves the imposition of disadvantages on the basis of misinformed stereotypes. This account can be generalized to also include cases of defective (or at least wildly improbable) theories regarding certain groups where evidence about the target group plays a limited role. This can often happen in religious objections to homosexuality, same-sex marriage, the status of women vis-à-vis men, and the like. Generally, the discriminator with misinformed stereotypes is *in theory* amenable to empirical data, whereas this type of religious discriminator is not. His basis for treating members of the target group disadvantageously is not based on empirical evidence. But here too the burden of proof is on the discriminator, since he has to think that the disadvantage he imposes is reasonably warranted.

Perhaps you might think the moral ideal is to judge people as individuals with specific characters and abilities, not as members of groups. But this may be psychologically unrealistic and is often impractical, so in practice we function socially with stereotypes of varying degrees of accuracy. Further, since social identity presupposes various group memberships, and because it makes no sense to imagine individuals without *some* sort of social identity, ignoring group membership is more than a practically unrealistic ideal, it is a fiction. We do not live in a state of nature as abstract individuals independent of social groups. So instead of trying to ignore this fact, we should acknowledge that the ethical issue is how group membership of one sort or another may legitimately be handled in dealing with individual persons.

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Frederik Kaufman is Professor of Philosophy & Religion at Ithaca College, NY.

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Protecting Academic Freedom

Dieter Schönecker makes five arguments for freedom of expression.

Ever since 2006, I've taught and researched practical philosophy at the University of Siegen in Germany. I have focused quite a bit on Immanuel Kant, whom I consider to be a *particularly* practical philosopher, but I deal with a wide range of topics in epistemology and applied ethics. Recently I organised a seminar series on freedom of speech, and set about inviting speakers. I wanted people from a range of theoretical and ideological positions, including some who had experienced controversy about the expression of their ideas. Therefore in March 2018 I informed the university administration that my invited speakers included Marc Jongen, cultural spokesman for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the German Parliament, and Thilo Sarrazin, a prominent member of the centre-left Social Democratic Party, who wrote a bestselling book attacking Germany's post-war immigration policies. In September, given the alleged right-wing backgrounds of Jongen and Sarrazin, the Dean prohibited me from using my financial resources to invite these speakers. Such resources are allotted to each professor on a yearly basis and commonly used for guest speakers and workshops. He later told me that it was only the use of faculty resources for expenses and *honoraria* that was prohibited. Shortly afterwards, however, I received a letter from the Dean and the Rector informing me that the use of *any* university resources was prohibited. This grew into a dispute that eventu-

ally became public, sparking a heated debate throughout Germany regarding freedom of speech for thinkers from conservative or right wing circles, such as Jongen and Sarrazin. On a personal level, a colleague felt entitled to issue me a 'final warning', and I was publically accused of an 'ego trip' by the Dean.

The whole controversy, in its occasionally absurd details, is not only philosophically interesting, but also helps us to cast an eye at what Kant called 'the crooked timber of humanity'. Out of the seminar's seven scheduled speakers – one later withdrew – three were not from the right of the political spectrum at all. Two of these count themselves as left-liberal, while I see myself as liberal. Despite this fairly even political balance, and although I'd also tried to invite a further fourteen individuals, none of whom, to put it cautiously, shares anything with the milieu of the right (Rainer Forst and Axel Honneth, for example), the University still reproached me publicly on repeated occasions for organizing a seminar that was 'one-sidedly oriented'. But even if I *had* only invited people from the spectrum of the right, this would still have been perfectly legitimate. Could anyone seriously claim that lecture series on, say, gender research or migration are always characterized by theoretical and political balance in terms of the list of invited speakers?

It was claimed again and again that my inclusion of Jongen and Sarrazin in the list of speakers meant that I myself had adopted a

right-wing ideological position. Aside from any interest in damaging my reputation, this insistence is rooted in a failure to grasp that one can be strongly conservative in ethical outlook yet extremely liberal in terms of legal rights. For instance, one can regard the practice of assisted dying as morally wrong, but still support the case for its legalisation, as I do. It is a sign of philosophical ignorance if the enemies of freedom (as Karl Popper would call them) are unable to recognize this elementary distinction between ethics and rights, and thus falsely infer something like a populist conception of law from an ethically conservative position. I was also astonished to see how little attention was accorded in this connection to the arguments of Kant or John Stuart Mill about the need for rational debate. The will to power seemed more in evidence than the will to argument. It was even claimed that the invitation of Jongen and Sarrazin contravened a legal requirement for political neutrality – although under German law it is only the University that is bound by this requirement rather than individual scholars or researchers. Certainly no questions are ever raised about ‘observing political neutrality’ in most seminars in sociology or the humanities.

Another complaint was that neither Jongen nor Sarrazin are academics, and hence should not be speaking at the University in the first place – although such status is by no means a necessary condition for being invited to speak at a university. If poets are invited to speak on the subject of contemporary verse, no one is seen mounting the barricades.

Free Speech: Not Just A Theoretical Research Topic

My seminar was concerned with *the philosophy and practice of the freedom of expression*. In this connection, ‘freedom of expression’ is a generic concept that embraces all of the freedoms that are included in Article 5 of the German *Grundgesetz*, our ‘Basic Law’. Freedom of expression doesn’t merely imply the absence of censorship. This freedom can also be restricted by non-judicial or non-governmental sanctions, and by forms of social tyranny which affect the well-being of those who openly express their thoughts and opinions. This can include various means of intimidation, such as death threats – something that I have actually experienced myself. The objection that someone like Sarrazin can still express his opinions in any way he likes is made far too quickly. It is quite true that no one has a right to teach at a *specific* university, or to participate in any *particular* congress or conference; but it also seems clear to me that all those who are appropriately qualified, and who keep within the limits of the law, have a fundamental right to participate *somehow* in the world of science, learning, and education. Clearly too, this is sometimes denied to scholars and researchers who are held to be associated with the right. Someone like Jongen, who trained as an academic philosopher, no longer has the chance to succeed in the competitive context of the German university system. And anyone like myself, who invites such people to speak without actually sharing their views, will soon find themselves relegated to the side table as well.

The techniques of social tyranny are far more subtle than the cudgels or crowbars of direct censorship or proscription. In an academic climate such as the one I found myself in, where private conversations are illegally recorded, it becomes very hard to avoid censoring oneself in advance.

It is an intellectual catastrophe when contentious people like

Ulrich Kutschera, Martin van Creveld, Jörg Baberowski or Rainer Wendt are no longer allowed to speak at a German university without the moral police from the *imperium paternale* [Kant’s term for paternal government. Ed.] being sent out on patrol.

Legal & Moral Rights To Freedom of Speech

Freedom of thought and expression must also include academic freedom. Before setting out my arguments for academic freedom, I would like to ask a simple question: Do I have the right, legally speaking, to invite Jongen and Sarrazin on the basis of academic freedom? The answer is, of course I have this right, it is conferred by Germany’s Basic Law – and indeed for good reason, for there are strong philosophical grounds for it, as we shall see. Academic freedom is a fundamental legal right that may only be legally restricted under very specific conditions, if at all.

You could object that my academic freedom was not being restricted in this case because I was still being allowed to hold my seminar. But if I am not permitted to draw on the usual resources for inviting speakers in the name of the University, and if, as the Dean instructed me, I am not even permitted to publicize the meetings in question via the usual email channels, then my academic freedom is in fact being significantly limited, even if being officially upheld at the same time.

However, the legal right to do something does not imply that it is sensible or justifiable to do it in a moral, political, or academic sense. So are there any good reasons beyond the issue of its legal permissibility which must allow Jongen and Sarrazin to be invited to speak in a university? I can see five such reasons, which we’ll look at soon.

But first a point about consistency. If we allow left-wing individuals such as Sahra Wagenknecht or Jutta Ditfurth to speak at the University of Siegen, why not right-wing individuals as well? It is inconsistent. No one will deny that the humanities departments in our universities regularly invite academic speakers who not only come from the left of the political spectrum but also expressly promote left-wing positions in their talks. Many of my colleagues pursue a fairly radical political perspective precisely through their academic work on issues such as migration, racism, gender studies and social justice. Just so that I am not misunderstood here: I find this to be not only normal but also acceptable in the context of academic study and research. I regarded it therefore as a completely unacceptable attack on the freedom of academic thought when Hungarian President Victor Orbán recently used a governmental edict to remove Gender Studies from the list of permitted Masters degrees in Hungary. But also intolerable in the context of academic study and research is the one-sidedness and intellectual exaggeration which is promoted on the left.

The Golden Rule

On the basis of consistency it is possible to develop an initial argument, which I call *the argument from the Golden Rule*. The Golden Rule enjoins: ‘Treat others as you yourself would wish to be treated in the same situation’. An enemy of free speech should therefore consider the following situation. Imagine that you wanted to invite someone to speak at your university – a person who some find morally or politically objectionable. Let’s assume, for instance, that the person in question is a Marxist. But you

stand on the ground of the Basic Law, as does the person you want to invite. Would you will that anyone should contest your right to invite that person? If not, you may not contest that right to other individuals who do not share your perspective, either.

We Can Always Be Wrong

My second argument reflects the fact that human beings are fallible; we can never be entirely sure that something we are quite convinced of actually is the case. So if we suppress a certain view, we can never completely exclude the possibility that we are suppressing a view that is correct. The claim that climate change is humanly produced is a good example. Anyone who questions this at a German university is almost treated as if they'd denied the Holocaust. Yet is it *impossible* that the claim is false? Moreover, a counter-position not only deserves to be heard in its own right, but is also something that, at least as a rule, proves most useful to us to consider, as this takes us further in our own thinking.

Now it is very often the case that views and opinions, or complex systems of views and opinions, are not simply true or false as a totality; they may be *partly true*; and we may also learn something from them.

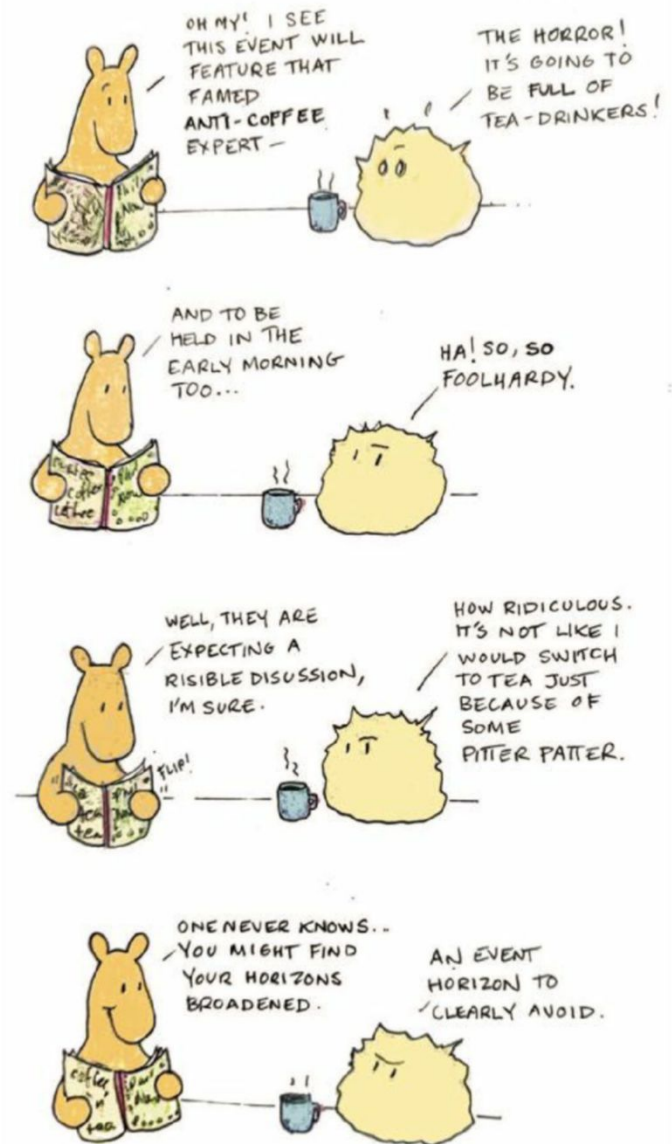
Let us briefly consider Jongen and Sarrazin. Sarrazin has been sharply criticized for claims he made regarding the inheritability of intelligence, in his anti-immigration tome *Germany Abolishes Itself*. Yet Axel Meyer, a renowned evolutionary biologist, wrote that in Sarrazin's book "the current state of knowledge about the genetic basis of intelligence was presented in a way that was largely scientifically correct." (*Adams Apfel und Evas Erbe*, 2015, p.254). It is not a question here (at least not for me) of the truth of these claims, but simply a question of whether they have any apparent plausibility. What I find disturbing is that combination of ignorance and dogmatism that would prevent us from thinking about certain claims which according to well-informed people are at least not entirely or self-evidently false, and may even be quite correct. If we followed the approach of Sarrazin's critics, we wouldn't be able to invite Steven Pinker to give a talk on intelligence either.

Or let us consider the case of Marc Jongen. In 2017 he was invited to speak at the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard College, in upstate New York, and there was a huge protest against the invitation. In his talk he said: "It would be a very bad idea to build our society and our nations and states on the concept of race, of genetic affiliation." On the other hand, he continues, we should not deny that "a sufficiently strong consciousness of *we* for a functioning democracy can only be established amongst a people [that shares] the same values and thus will engage in a common project for the future." And let me just quote another observation, that it is "important to morality that *I* can only be a moral agent because *we* are moral agents... Detached from my community, I will be apt to lose my hold on all genuine criteria of judgement." In case you didn't notice, this last quotation is drawn not from Jongen but from the ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre. Would the enemies of freedom also try to prevent anyone from inviting that world-renowned philosopher to the University of Siegen merely because he regards a patriotism as a virtue?

But this argument from fallibility has further implications. We can still learn something by engaging with other views and opinions *even if they are completely false* (although it should be

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by Melissa Felder



added, we can rarely know whether they *are* completely false). Consider Peter Singer. In his book *Practical Ethics* (1979), Singer argues for some positions which horrify many people, such as that there are particular conditions in which it would be permissible to kill handicapped new-born infants. There are good reasons for regarding this view as mistaken, and also as extremely dangerous from a moral and political perspective. Should we therefore prevent Singer from giving lectures (as has in fact already happened in Germany)? I do not think so. And this is precisely because an engagement with his theses – even if we *know* that they're false – provides an important touchstone for articulating our own positions, and thereby becoming more aware of the gaps, problems, and implications of our positions. Anyone who defends a theory must be prepared, and able, to defend it against possible objections.

Engagement, contestation, and doubt are important sources

of progress, and so we may profit from thinking about views that we regard as false, and perhaps even as dangerous. If we turn the university into an echo chamber, we shall find all these sources drying up.

At the Court of Reason

My third argument is a strategic one. A university auditorium is not a marketplace where people cry up their wares, but a place for reasoned argument. I was not offering Jongen and Sarrazin an uncontested 'platform', but bringing them before the court of reason. Either their arguments really are as weak as many claim them to be, in which case an academic audience will be able to expose them; or their arguments are not so poor after all, in which case it's worth giving them a hearing. Is it not permitted for an academic to debate with racists without being suspected of being a racist themselves? It is true that if Jongen and Sarrazin are racists, their presentations might encourage certain racist tendencies. That is possible. But it is at least equally plausible that more individuals than before will recognize how problematic or untenable their positions are. The 'consequentialist' approach, according to which actions must be judged in terms of their consequences (rather than, say, the intentions behind them), works on the strong assumption that we can actually know what will happen as a result of actions. Even if this is sometimes possible, it is certainly not the case here. And even if it were true that my seminar might encourage racism, I would not thereby be responsible for the actions of any third party. Breweries are not responsible for the fact that certain people commit crimes under the influence of drink, and nor do we see that fact as a good reason to introduce prohibition.

The objection that there was no need to invite Jongen and Sarrazin to speak at the University in the first place since one could simply read their books, is, if not completely false, certainly overdrawn. It is false in the sense that direct and personal communication with individuals may teach us much more, or at least something different, than we can learn from the study of their texts. Even if that turns out not to be the case, the objection proves too much, since if it were upheld there would then be no need for talks or lectures at all! At any rate, I must say that my personal encounter with both speakers has only strengthened the impression that I'd already received from reading their texts that they are not racists, let alone Nazis.

Weakening the Defences

The core of my fourth argument is that restricting freedom of thought and expression in any case where this restriction only *might* be justifiable tends to reduce the limits of tolerance to ideas, which narrows the space of freedom even further.

A central reason for this weakening of freedom is the imprecise and inflationary use of terms such as 'racism', 'nationalism', 'sexism', 'essentialism', 'homophobia', 'contempt for humanity', and so on. Thus one colleague, as he put it to me, takes Sarrazin to be a racist with whom he would not wish to appear in the same series of lectures. That is his perfect right. But what does racism mean here? In my view it is absurd to claim that someone is a racist just because they say there are such things as genetically distinguishable ethnic groups ('races'); and even more absurd to claim that someone is a racist because they challenge, as Sar-

razin does, the idea that all human beings possess an unlimited right to migrate to every country in the world. It seems to me that someone is a racist if they believe *not only* that there are biologically distinguishable human populations *but also* that these distinctions imply differences in value, perhaps going so far as to endorse the appalling idea that certain populations are intrinsically superior to others and so are entitled to rule over them. I cannot see that Sarrazin is a racist in this sense.

In Dubio Pro Libertate

This brings me to my fifth and final argument, which can be described as a meta-argument. Let us assume that the enemies of freedom found all my previous arguments unconvincing. And let us suppose that these enemies of freedom were not actually enemies of freedom: that they are simply lovers of freedom who want to protect it from its true – that is, its anti-democratic, racist and nationalistic – opponents. They would therefore respect my academic freedom of thought and expression too. Shouldn't they be able to entertain some doubt about their own critical position in order to see whether there might be something to be said for my arguments? And shouldn't they at least allow me the right to be mistaken? Isn't freedom such a *preeminent* good that it should be restricted only in the most extreme predicaments? And is the predicament I presented really so great, and the doubt or uncertainty over the permissibility of restricting me so minor? I would argue that what holds for the right of the accused in a criminal trial holds for freedom of expression too: *in dubio pro libertate*. If in doubt, allow freedom.

Anyone who treats freedom of thought and expression as a kind of 'fair weather' principle, only to be promoted for the kind of thought and expression we like, has not understood what this freedom means. And to put it bluntly, it has certainly not been understood by the Faculty Council, the Senate, and the University Council at Siegen, all of which endorsed the restrictions approved by the university administration. Nor has it been understood by most of the committee members of the German Society for Philosophy, who proved unable to show solidarity with me in this matter. In the summer of 2018, Claudia Roth, the Vice President of the German Parliament, delivered a speech which specifically defended freedom of thought and expression. Yet when I later asked her for the full text of her speech she refused, saying "We do not support any proceedings which offer a platform to racist positions or those of the extreme right."

It is one thing to attack the *right* to academic freedom (which attack is not legitimate), and another to criticize the specific *exercise* of this right (which criticism may of course be entirely legitimate). But anyone who attempts not only to criticise but to systematically restrict the academic freedom of another colleague – for example by calling on the Rector of Siegen to 'disinvite' my two speakers – deserves to be called an enemy of freedom. The friends of freedom must defend themselves. For, as Kant pointedly observed, anyone who turns himself into a worm cannot later complain if he gets trampled on.

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Dieter Schönecker is Professor of Practical Philosophy at the University of Siegen, and currently a visiting professor at Stanford University. He is the founder of the Centre for Commentary on Kant (ZetKIK).

Dewey & Climate Denial²

Wendy Lynne Lee says consumerism really is the end of the world.

Science, argued John Dewey, is ‘an instrumentality of the arts’. What he seems to have meant is that science is not only about seeking an objective understanding of the world but also about a commitment to truth as a social and aesthetic value. Perhaps this seems obvious, but there’s more to this bit of common sense – a ‘more’ that I think more important now than ever. For Dewey can help us see clearly why some people and societies have such an investment – intellectual and economic – in denying climate change, and also what we stand to lose if we do not act to mitigate its results.

In attempting to convince you of this, my argument will rely on four elements. Firstly I’ll recap the nature of the environmental and existential crisis posed by climate change. Secondly I’ll examine how climate change denial as a system of beliefs is connected with the capitalist worldview. I will make use of Dewey’s argument for what he calls *the aesthetic in experience*. And I will critically reinterpret Dewey’s argument in light of the counterfeit aesthetic required by the capitalist worldview.

Dewey? Who He?

John Dewey (1859-1952) was a leading figure in the tradition of philosophy we call American Pragmatism. In his 1925 book *Experience and Nature*, he argued that many of our everyday experiences have aspects that are essentially aesthetic. These include richness, diversity, novelty and duration. This is what makes experiences worth having, and that is why everyone would also wish them to always be features of our future experiences too. It would surely seem that whatever endangers this

sort of experience is something we’d want to confront head-on, for ourselves, and for the sake of generations to come.

Climate change plainly is just such a threat, especially since we know that human behavior is a major cause of it, and human behavior can change. This is not to deny that such change is a tall order, but simply to point out that it’s possible. When science showed us that smoking causes cancer, people began to stop smoking, however begrudgingly. The value of science, after all, isn’t that it gives us what we *want*; it’s that we recognize, even against our narrow self-interest, that knowledge is essential to any life worth living and any future experience worth wanting. If climate change threatens that future, we surely want to make every effort to mitigate it.

The trouble is that our actions, individually and collectively, tell a very different story. Not only do people deny that the climate change crisis is the result of human activity; they even deny that there’s any crisis to deny. This is the denial of denial: denial² (denial squared). Denial², the denial not only that climate change is caused by human activity, but that there is any climate change at all, isn’t merely a decision to *ignore* the facts of climate change; it’s behaving as if the facts were radically different than they are – that the world is radically differently than it in fact, is.

How can this be? What could persuade us to ignore what science has made so clear? What is the mechanism by which such a perspective could gain purchase in so many minds? We know that various aesthetic elements of our experience are already being degraded by the impacts of climate change. So, why aren’t we doing everything possible to mitigate the damage? Have we decided not to know? *Can* we decide not to know? It seems we can. After all, zoos are not the natural habitats of Sumatran elephants. Killer whales do not naturally belong in Sea World menageries. Natural history museum exhibits – however interactive – aren’t substitutes for lost mountain vistas and prairie expanses. Each is a *counterfeit* of the aesthetic in experience, at least as Dewey envisions it. They are poor substitutes for a natural world that we are killing. They show that we are good at fooling ourselves.

The Consumer Capitalist Worldview

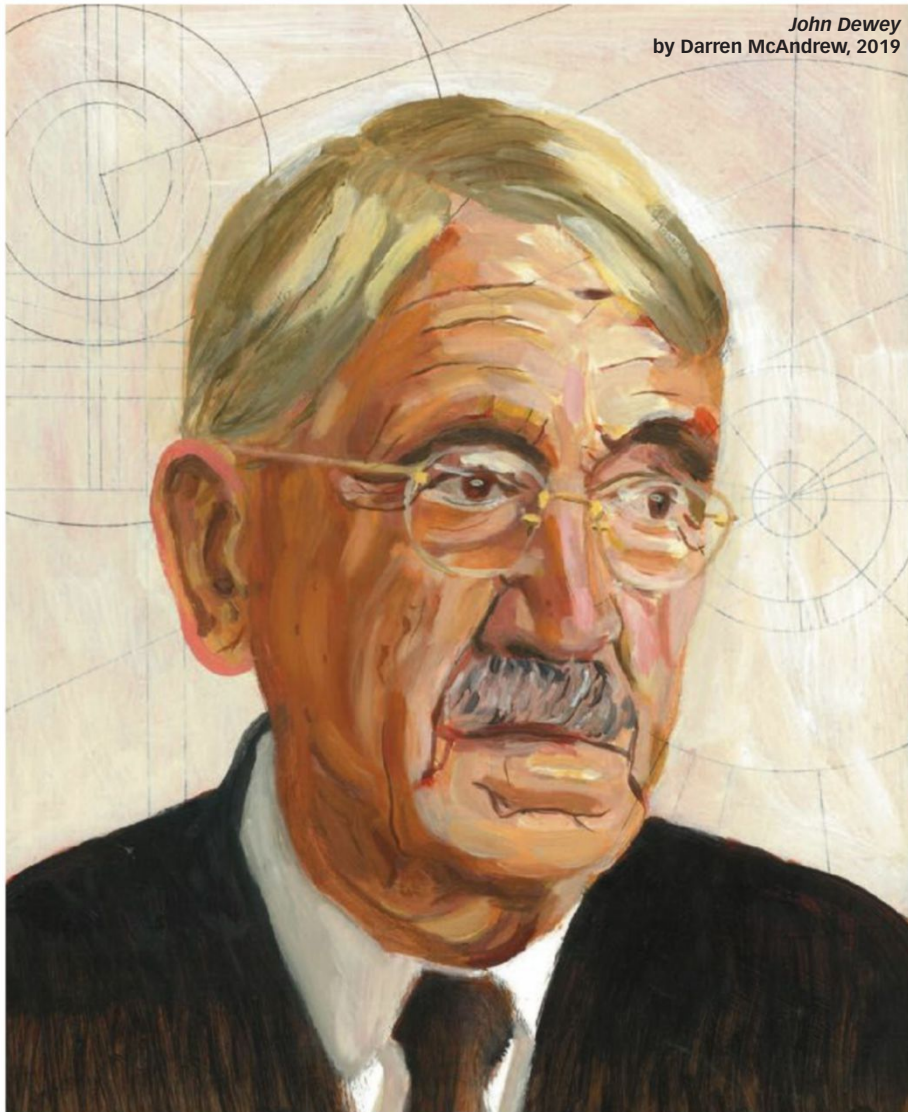
For those wishing to uphold the capitalist worldview it’s vital to convince the rest of us that the aesthetic or positive qualities of our everyday experience are facilitated not by any thoughtful appreciation of nature, but by the endless consumption of products. In short, the measure of something’s value is how much stuff you can exchange it for. The difficulty, however, is that such a conception of value cannot be made to cohere with facts about the planet.

The plausibility of the idea that value is centrally to be found in the limitless exchange or circulation of products requires us to assume certain things:



“Climate change is not caused by man. Can I tell you my views about something else...?”

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Firstly, that we have either an atmosphere capable of absorbing endless emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants necessary to sustain that production; or else that we have adequate non-hydrocarbon sources of energy. The alternative energy sources *are* possible, but so far are either inadequate to sustain our current levels of consumption or else present their own environmental hazards.

Secondly that we have endless sources of clean water, breathable air, arable soil, rare earth minerals (for mobile phones and computers) and labor.

Thirdly, that we can be persuaded to behave as if the ‘world’ grounded in these presuppositions is how our planet really is.

Lastly, denial² demands we be convinced not merely that the capitalist worldview mirrors facts about the planet, but that what the world it presents offers is what we (ought to) want – that the world it offers us is the aesthetically desirable

world, and that consumption of goods is the highest form of aesthetic experience.

Among the key premises of contemporary capitalism is the idea that the planet upon which its enterprise depends is a self-recovering cornucopia of resources. This is what the economist Herman Daly calls ‘the myth of endless resources’ – including endless extractible hydrocarbons, endlessly cleanable water and scrubbable air, endless arable soil, animal bodies, and cheap labor, and perhaps most important, a limitless celestial vault in which to emit greenhouse gases (*Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development*, 1996). This myth – the archetypal narrative of modern capitalism – is a core premise for capitalism’s central operative idea, that *everything is a potential commodity* – that is, that the value of something lies in its potential to be exchanged in the interest of profits. Given the combined power of the myth of end-

less resources and the idea that the value of everything lies in its potential to be commodified, it’s not surprising that the consequences include pollution, desertification, deforestation, disease, and the geopolitical instabilities that follow, all of this increasing human desperation.

These, however, are the *fixable* environmental crises. We can compel coal-fired power plants to install air scrubbers, develop new antibiotics and anti-viral drugs, plant trees, deliver food aid. The fixable crises make clear the radically different threat posed by the crisis of climate change. ‘Anthropogenic’ implies more than simply meaning ‘human-caused’: the anthropogenic element is also the barometer of the extent to which our disposition towards the planet is defined by the myth of endless resources. It is the extent to which we believe that ‘dilution is always the solution’; or that such a thing as ‘clean coal’ exists; that hydrocarbons are limitless; or even that human activities cannot generate a greenhouse effect. All these examples indicate the operation of the assumption that the capitalist ‘world’ is the actual planet on which we live.

To be clear, it’s not that we’ve given up the idea of a verdant world where an aesthetic experience of nonhuman nature is possible. It’s not that we’ve resigned ourselves either to the denuded world actually offered by capitalism and its products. Instead, capitalism offers us a *counterfeit* world: the world packaged and marketed *as if* it were the planet; as if the planet really were an endless treasure trove of the aesthetic experience to which we think we’re entitled. This isn’t cognitive dissonance; it’s epistemic simulacra – fake knowledge. Denial² signals our commitment to painted zoo savannas, artificial shorelines, or ‘Sounds of the Tropics’ on iTunes, as if the consumption of a day at the zoo, the beach, or the spa offers exactly the aesthetic experience we desire.

A Myth Exposed

The trouble, of course, is not merely that this is a scam, but that it’s an unsustainable scam grounded in premises we know to be false and yet usually don’t actually think about at all.

- *The myth of endless resources is false:* The planet, its living and nonliving things,

Proverbs for Engraving onto Imperial Monuments

War is the price of freedom. Depths bewilder.
The blow aimed at the beast hits him who shields it.
The sword of Justice best serves him who wields it.
The gibbet's final victim is its builder.
A round coin rolls to him who most deserves it.
A tree outlives its leaves; an age, its fashions.
A carthorse needs its blinders; man, his passions.
The word of Justice best shields him who serves it.
The ardent spirit breaks the firm retort.
Power bears scrutiny like the sun the gaze.
God speaks His queer commands one thousand ways.
The worm awaits. The butterfly is dreaming.
The price of peace is bondage. Chains support.
Persuasion is a proof. Seeing is seeming.

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Daniel Galef graduated last year from McGill University with a degree in philosophy and classics. He collects counterfeit coins and lives on the edge of a mountain with his cat, Carson, who is also a philosopher.

ecological systems, and atmosphere are not limitless repositories of extractables, recuperative capacity, and waste disposal.

- *Commodification does not reflect true value:* While the value of everything can potentially be converted to its exchange value, the planet cannot support an endless circulation of exchanges premised on infinite resources.
- *Human nature is not defined exclusively by material self-interest:* Human beings are both the labor and the consumers needed by the capitalist world. But the idea that material self-interest defines us is not part of our existential condition. Our self-interest does not necessarily coincide with industry's self-interest, and there is more to us than self-interest anyway.

A detractor might point out that it's not necessarily true that everything can be assigned a market value – that of course some things remain sacred. But this is manifestly false on the evidence, which seems to tell us that everything has its price. Moreover, deciding what counts as sacred is itself subject to the capitalist calculus. Critically endangered white rhinos slaughtered for the commodity value of their horns will become extinct, and documentaries about white rhinos aren't white rhinos. Driven to extinction by the exchange value assigned to their feathers, passenger pigeons are now museum props for natural history exhibits. Sugar is routinely assigned a higher value than the sea creatures suffocated by Red Tide along the Florida coastline. The challenge then for the capitalist 'world' isn't the preservation of some notion of the sacred to which we assign aesthetic value, it's the preservation of the natural world itself. In 2018 a report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that if global temperatures rise by 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, a tipping point will be reached with catastrophic consequences. There may be counterfeit opportunities for aesthetic experience, but there's no such thing as coun-

terfeit existential conditions. Indeed, the very idea of a replacement *planet* only exposes the lie of the premises of the capitalist worldview. Climate change thus brings into sharp focus the self-contradictory conditions of denial², in that to deny that there is such a thing as climate change first forms an essential condition for the continuation of the capitalist world and its worldview, then ensures that the capitalist world will reach its apex in the destruction of the conditions necessary for its own continuation. In other words, denial² instantiates what can be described as the 'defining nihilism' at the center of capitalism.

John Dewey and the Aesthetic In Experience

John Dewey's concept of the aesthetic in experience offers a compelling lens through which to examine denial². For Dewey, the aesthetic in experience is as much a feature of scientific investigation as it is of art, and crucial to making the world desirable as opposed to merely knowable. For Dewey, science is a variety of creative labor requiring imagination in addition to knowledge, experimental rigor, and appeal to such principles as falsifiability or elegance. "It would then be seen", writes Dewey, "that science is an art, that art is practice, and that the only distinction worth drawing is not between practice and theory, but between those modes of practice that are not intelligent, not inherently and immediately enjoyable, and those which are full of enjoyed meanings" (*Experience and Nature*, p.358).

Each of science's disciplines offers a unique way of interacting with the natural world, of coming to appreciate its interdependencies; and so each offers a unique opportunity for deeper forms of satisfaction. In short, science encourages development of an aesthetic sensibility grounded in the joy of knowledge – even (or especially) when it's unexpected.

Science includes the aesthetic in experience because knowing is an 'operative art' (p.367) corresponding to the capacity for reflection. Science, as Dewey notes, is not only able to induce a unique enjoyment in an experience 'reflectively chosen' for its correspondence to the natural world, but defines itself as a sincere commitment to epistemic integrity – to following the evidence wherever it leads, regardless of whether it supports a preferred, or profitable, view of the world.

Science thus tells us not only about the kinds of complex and diverse worlds in which aesthetic experience is made possible, but also about the kinds of worlds where it's threatened:

"There are two sorts of worlds in which aesthetic experience would not occur. In a world of mere flux, change would not be cumulative; it would not move towards a close. Stability and rest would have no being. Equally it is true, however, that a world that is finished, ended, would have no traits of suspense and crisis, and would offer no opportunity for resolution... Because the actual world, that in which we live, is a combination of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions, the experience of a living creature is capable of aesthetic quality." (p.358)

There are two ways – both illuminating – to read this passage. First as saying that the world that makes a place for the aesthetic in experience is precisely that world within which the natural processes and events that animate living things create the conditions for formulating value. Neither the world of abso-



lute flux nor the ‘finished’ world would make possible experiences of any such kind, since in the world of flux there exists no opportunity for reflection or anticipation, and in the finished world nothing happens to be the subject of experience at all. No sense can be made of either as desirable, as nothing about them occasions wonder.

Neither of these possibilities, however, quite capture the capitalist ‘world’; and so I want to suggest an alternative reading, which says that insofar as the world of the aesthetic in experience demands truth-

tellers committed to revealing the world in an experience of all of its ‘combination of movement and culmination’, it cannot afford to elect ends over means. Someone seeking a true aesthetic experience can’t afford to subordinate reason to ends already given, since to do so ignores a quality vital to *doing science*; that of the freedom from imposed presuppositions required for objectivity. Yet capitalism requires precisely the reduction of means to ends already given: the ends being commodification for profit. In the capitalist world, ends determine means because they

govern what has value – what gets distilled from the flux as valuable, or in other words, marketable: hydrocarbons, sugars, animal bodies, labor... Nothing true about the world can matter to the capitalist as a capitalist other than insofar as it serves his ends: for him, things exist *for* exchange.

Having said that, the possibility for an aesthetic in experience *does* exist for the capitalist world. It exists according to premises that, while utterly anathema to the facts about the world revealed by the sciences, are nonetheless able to offer a sufficiently coherent counterfeit narrative, for which not only the denial of fact is made possible, but the denial *that* there are facts to deny is made possible: denial². Dewey is right that an aesthetic in experience requires some conditions to ground its possibility; he’s also right that there exist conditions where no such experience is possible. But he doesn’t notice, or miscalculates, the fraudulent power of capitalism to determine a worldview wherein the ‘flux’ is commandeered by exchange value, and so consumption forms the ‘event’ of the aesthetic in experience.

Denial², the denial that there is any such thing as climate change, is a result not of any truth that could be the product of open-ended empirical investigation as Dewey describes it, but rather of a worldview in which the reduction of all things to a lowest common denominator renders the planet as a repository of resources whose value is determined by their capacity to be commodified. The value of water isn’t as *water*, but rather as a substrate for chemical solvents for hydraulic fracturing, or an opportunity to cash-in on bottling its last clean drops; air is a repository for volatile organic compounds; soil a distribution medium for fertilizer; vegetation a substrate for high-fructose corn syrup; animal bodies are for deep-fat friers; human beings for labor.

Detached from its moorings in what Dewey recognizes as the aesthetic value belonging to the pursuit of truth, science becomes an instrumentality for capitalism rather than for art. But this isn’t merely because the technologies of extraction and manufacture are dependent on science. Rather, science must also continue to be associated with the aesthetic in experience, although to ends radically different from what Dewey had envisioned.



Bottled Water, A Case In Point

Consider, for example, bottled water. It is marketed as if shapely plastic bottles were water's natural condition (rather like as if pink were the natural color of animal flesh). Companies compete for consumers via the aesthetic presentation of their packaging. One type of water, for example, advertises itself as 'artisan' and includes a bright pink flower on the plastic wraps of its twelve packs. Another brand goes for the more 'euro-chic' look of tall narrow bottles with sleek silver caps. Both brands capitalize on a scarce existential necessity by treating it as both scarce and abundant; that is, scarce enough to be priced like gold or diamonds, *and* abundant enough that polluting it via the processes necessary to bottle it in plastic bottles poses no significant hazard. The latter, of course, is false: it is also presupposed by the switch to bottled water in the first place. If we believed tap water was pure, or even safe to drink, who'd spend the money to buy bottled?

It's at just this juncture, however, that the counterfeit aesthetic plays a key role. Bottled water is advertised as 'clean' or 'pure'; but this isn't because bottled water companies have any interest in what consumers know about their water. After all, tap water may contain less arsenic than their 'clean' product. Moreover, 'clean' needn't mean *clean* (even if it's true); it means 'cool' – as in what can be afforded by the affluent as water. Were the point simply the purity, then dewy pink flowers or shiny sleek cylinders would be unnecessary and the advertising wouldn't need to promote sciencey-sounding promises, such as a reassurance that the product conforms to US Food and Drug Administration specifications and testing protocols.

The point I'm making isn't about water. It's about how the sciences are used by the world of capital to engineer its products, provide a vocabulary to its promises, and conceal its destruction of resources. The story of water is simply perhaps the most perverse variation on the theme of the counterfeit aes-

thetic, just because water is an existential necessity. Diverted by bottled water's aesthetic claim to be 'clean', we're invited to ignore important things that the sciences – chemistry, biology, epidemiology, neurology, bacteriology, environmental sciences – tell us; namely, that clean water for those who can't afford bottled has become increasingly scarce due to industrial dumping, and/or the appropriation by international conglomerates of what's left.

The upshot is, if we can be successfully conned into buying bottled water by transparently false advertising campaigns, is it any wonder that we're susceptible to denial? The bottled water story is about an existential necessity. Yet even this story is about the kind of *fixable* environmental crisis that climate change *isn't*. If our analysis of bottled water shows the capitalist world to be inconsistent with a good life for the world's poor, what anthropogenic climate change makes all the clearer is that the capitalist worldview is inconsistent with *all* life. This is why the denial of climate change is critically importance for the preservation of the capitalist system. Unlike other environmental crises where we've made our peace with the devil – giving up Sumatran elephants, polar bears, and leatherback turtles to extinction so we can keep driving SUVs and eating burgers – climate change gives the lie to the myth of endless resources and the edifice of endless consumption built on its rickety scaffolding. Climate change can bring it *all* down.

Can reflection on that possibility disrupt what seems a seamless disposition to an attitude of denial? If we continue not to know what we don't know, can firenadoes, melting ice caps, increasingly catastrophic hurricanes, mass human starvation and migration, or ever more virulent outbreaks of disease persuade us to change?

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Wendy Lynne Lee is professor of philosophy at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania.

Cosmopolitanism & Immigration

Michael S. Dauber smuggles in some ideas from the continent.

The benefits promised to us by our human rights are extremely varied. Some of the most important are grand intangibles such as justice, free speech and freedom of worship. Others are very tangible indeed. The right to life implies a right to the basic necessities that sustain life, such as food and drinking water. Without a right to food and water in emergencies, all of the other rights can swiftly become meaningless. In his book *Human Rights: Concept and Context* (2002), Brian Orend, a human rights philosopher, argues that those who possess the objects of these human rights – food, water, medical treatment – have an obligation to help those who lack such objects to gain access to them. In a synthesis of his own ideas with those of Thomas Pogge, Orend argues that both individuals and institutions are responsible for providing people with access to their vital needs, which is essential to the fulfilment of their human rights.

Many wealthy countries have populations that possess the objects of human rights, and undoubtedly also possess the means of securing these rights for at least a few thousand others more. Although Orend does not specifically deal with immigration in his work, one can easily argue that the opening of borders to some of those who do not qualify under current immigration policies is a moral obligation from the human rights perspective. Given the international commitment to the idea that human rights are universal, this is especially true in the context of mass migrations caused by persecution, genocide, war, or large-scale natural disasters. Cosmopolitanism – the idea that as human beings we are all equally of intrinsic value, regardless of our nation of origin – motivates us to act benevolently toward others wherever possible. If we take seriously our obligations to aid those in need, should we open our borders as wide as reasonably possible? Is this how we should respond to the flow of refugees? I will summarize some points made by Continental philosophers in this cosmopolitan tradition, to see if they help to cast light on our current predicament, and then will consider some objections to the relaxation of immigration controls before trying to draw some lessons.

Some Cosmopolitan Perspectives

Two cosmopolitan philosophers who made some interesting points on migration and refugees are Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas. Derrida took inspiration from history. In *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001), he promotes the idea of ‘cities of refuge’ – places where one could go to be safe or to receive aid. Such cities have existed in various forms throughout history, ranging from places one could flee from honor-driven revenge schemes in the ancient (Jewish) Torah, to cities to which one could flee to be free from war and destruction in medieval Italy. Arguably the United States as a whole is the epitome of a ‘city of refuge’ – a society founded on the immigration of the poor and oppressed where political, racial, sexual, or religious persecution is, quite literally, illegal. Derrida’s emphasis

on cities also presents an alternative to sweeping national policies: might we leave immigration policies up to individual cities? One may still need to do security or background checks to maintain national security; but establishing cities of refuge in which immigrants are welcome would help carve a path for them, rather than forcing them to find their own way in an unfamiliar, inhospitable land. It could ease some of the problems faced by those compelled to leave their country of origin and enable more flexible planning by their host communities.

Emmanuel Levinas, writing in response to the horrors of the Holocaust and the darker side of Heideggerian existentialism, argued that from a phenomenological perspective the other is ‘unknowable’ (see for example, *Is Ontology Fundamental?*, 1996). In other words, we simply cannot know precisely what other people are experiencing and thinking. As we cannot assume that foreign others are hostile to us, we have a duty to try to understand them. Dialogue enables us to truly ‘hear’ them, discouraging us from passively allowing them to be harmed. Such encounters make it impossible to ignore the pleas of the helpless.

Long before this, Immanuel Kant, developing the cosmopolitan ideal in his ‘Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective’ (1784), argued that because borders are not natural distinctions but man-made, we all have a natural right to traverse the Earth. This does have limits, he suggested, as one must seek permission to stay in a foreign country permanently. As I’ll discuss later, one of the major concerns citizens have over increased immigration is a loss of cultural identity. Yet Kant’s discussion of the positive influence of interaction and cooperation with foreigners provides a compelling reason to enlarge the immigrant pool. By increasing its diversity and allowing in new ways of thinking, we actually improve our culture, adding to its competitiveness through cooperation.

This idea is further illuminated by Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to*



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Ourselves (1991). She argues that whatever we consider foreign in others is simply part of ourselves we have repressed; so by encountering and understanding others, we come to know *ourselves*, and have little reason to remain isolated. Furthermore, cultural paranoia and fear of others fades away when we encounter and truly understand others as not so different from ourselves. Once we see that regardless of our different cultures we are capable of similar acts and achievements, and that at heart we share certain core values, we no longer have any compelling reason to abandon others to their fate. From both a psychological and a moral perspective, we have a responsibility to learn from each other, since this process helps all involved to improve as ethical and cultural beings.

This collective improvement can be seen in a financial light too. According to Andres J. Pumariega and Eugenio Rothe, contrary to the popular notion that more immigration would be an economic drain, studies have shown that states and nations with more open immigration policies actually benefited in terms of tax revenue ('Leaving No Children or Families Outside: The Challenges of Immigration', in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 2010). The data suggests that one of the common arguments against immigration reform – that expanded policies will create a financial drain – is incorrect. However, this particular line of thought is more complicated than it seems.

Arguments Against Immigration Reform

Let's now turn to arguments *against* more open borders. In light of human rights, these arguments are considerably weaker than

commonly thought. One I've mentioned comes from the financial sphere. Although studies suggest that immigration actually benefits the economy, there are lurking variables. First, in the twenty-first century there are fewer open geographic spaces left for immigrant populations to expand into than there were in earlier waves of immigration, and this limits the potential for the sort of economic growth that was often a result of those earlier movements. Additionally, one could argue that states profit from *controlled* immigration, which typically involves admitting people with special skills and employment qualifications. Generally speaking, many who immigrate illegally may have little or no significant immediate financial potential, and may require welfare or medical assistance. In this regard, many have argued that expanding immigration policies without qualification would actually create a financial drain.

There are several other economic concerns. Some have argued that taxing the population at a higher rate to cover increased welfare and bureaucratic costs would decrease the overall standard of living for large portions of the population. This might seem unfair to those who feel they didn't do anything to deserve having those standards lowered. Another argument regards the job market. If the job market is poor and the unemployment rate high, adding more individuals looking for work will compound the problem. Although this argument presents a significant concern, one response is that an increased number of residents would increase the number needing services, generating new jobs.

Both Derrida and Richard Kearney highlight another issue: security. In our time, arguably the biggest national security fear in the developed world is terrorism. Opening borders indiscriminately potentially opens the door to terrorists, spies, and other unsavory individuals who would pose a threat to the common welfare. Derrida touches on this simply by pointing to the ambiguity of encountering another person (see ‘Hostipitality,’ in *Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 2000). One does not know if the other is a friend or a foe. Kearney in his 2003 book *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* tackles this ambiguity head-on. While we should be open to others, he cautions against being so open as to become unreasonably susceptible to harm. “You can kill the alien as a threatening enemy or overcome the initial fear and respond with a gesture of welcome” – but we must always be aware that the other is equally capable of hospitality or hostility. However, Kearney also notes that we mustn’t scapegoat entire groups of people for our problems, as many previous societies have. Although it may be true that individual members of other groups commit atrocities against us, we must be vigilant not to blame entire cultures for the world’s problems. Instead, we must “look into our own psyches and examine our consciences in the mirror of our gods and monsters.” (p.43)

Finally, some have argued that significant immigration forces a transformation of cultural identity, and so immigration should be heavily restricted. I’ve already described Kant’s answer to this cultural concern. Our culture and traditions need not be threatened, but can be enhanced and strengthened by this encounter with other cultures. To this I can only add that the cultures of many wealthy nations are already inherently diverse, and that such diversity is a valuable asset.

These concerns seem most pressing at present in regard to the Syrian conflict. The issue is not simply about the economic costs of helping a massive number of desperate refugees, but a struggle for many in the West to overcome racial and religious biases they have against the Middle East. These flawed cultural concerns do nothing to reduce our moral obligation to protect the right to life of all human beings and secure universal human dignity.

Towards Cosmopolitanism

In the light of these arguments, how should we proceed? The answer, I think, depends ultimately on what sort of people we want to be. To be cosmopolitan is to be open to the personal growth that comes from the transformative power of new ideas from elsewhere. But if we choose the path of cosmopolitanism, of regarding all people as having equal intrinsic value, then the logic of that position must lead us to support human rights for all and a commitment to universal human dignity. If so, then how can we begin to effect change?

In ‘Toward a Mutual Hospitality’ (2013), Luce Irigaray discusses the notion that our world is constantly and comprehensively designated as the property of one culture or another: there is no neutral space, both physically and metaphorically, in which we may discuss our differences. What we need, Irigaray argues, is a neutral, open, hospitable place where groups can discuss their difference. By fostering mutual understanding and respect, such a place would make cosmopolitan hospitality possible. We must step outside our own natural place and concerns, and address the concerns of the other without forcing the other to conform to

our own culture, and without trying to invade the other’s. This notion is reinforced by Jean-Louis Chrétien, who emphasizes the need to let the other speak in order to achieve understanding: “The first hospitality is nothing other than listening” (*The Ark of Speech*, 2004). Further, we must listen completely and objectively, hearing what the other has to say without forcing their words to conform to our own biases. Indeed, language provides an ark that bridges the chasm between ourselves and others, or between one’s native countrymen and foreigners.

Irigaray’s and Chrétien’s ideas on hospitality give us ways to understand other cultures and to address the cultural concerns some have about increasing immigration. Much of the anxiety arises from a simple lack of understanding, or an unwillingness to hear what others have to say and learn why they need help. By opening ourselves to others and truly hearing them, such hospitality helps us to bridge the gap between even the most different of cultures.

If we hold the cosmopolitan view that we all have value as human beings regardless of our background or location, then it seems a moral obligation to extend hospitality to those in need all over the world as much as we can. Accordingly, the cosmopolitan ideal in human rights holds that we are obligated to help others regardless of nation of origin. Additionally, the cosmopolitan emphasis on the universal value of persons and on the benefits of meeting diverse people strongly reinforces the notion that immigration can only help native populations, in terms both of financial gain and cultural and moral excellence. In many cases, this can be accomplished simply by allowing immigration – inviting others into one’s country as permanent guests, which is the ultimate form of hospitality. A further step along the path would be to relax refugee quotas to allow those to come who are truly in need and who, if denied, have no feasible alternative but to migrate illegally, perhaps entrusting themselves to human traffickers. The abundant wealth of most of the countries where this magazine is read makes it more than just possible for them to provide many more individuals with the objects of their vital needs than we currently allow. We cannot, however, ignore concerns over security; nor can we pretend that the well is limitless. I do not argue for no borders at all, devoid of limits or of a screening process. What I argue is subtler, more reasonable, and closer to the ‘golden mean’ that Aristotle advocates for moral action. We should not let in everyone, for that could lead to a financial and security disaster in light of the present global economy and recent terrorist threats; but neither should we be so strict that we barely allow anyone access to our resources. The trick is to find the healthiest medium – which I believe we have not yet reached. I argue simply that we are more than capable of helping thousands more individuals in need than our current policies make possible.

Collectively, the nations of the world could absorb a massive influx of refugees with relatively little cost and with significant benefit, moral and otherwise. I submit that this is what we must do in the case of those fleeing warfare and economic hardship. Not only do we have the capacity: on this sketch of human rights, we have an obligation.

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Michael S. Dauber is studying law at St John’s University and is a member of the St John’s Law Review. He has an MA in Bioethics from the New York University College of Global Public Health.

Question of the Month ? ? ?

Who Is The Worst Philosopher?



Each answer below receives a book. Apologies to the entrants not included.

This is a difficult question as ‘the worst philosopher’ is liable to be considered not a ‘true’ philosopher at all!

It may be best to make clear the qualities of ‘great’ philosophy, in order to shed light on the worst kind of philosophy, and consequently apply these weaknesses of thought to a specific individual, who then would seem ‘the worst philosopher’.

Firstly, they should lack the high standard of critical thinking marking great philosophy. The work of a poor philosopher is liable to consist of unclear and indistinct ideas, and obscure, confused, overly-abstracted arguments, making it difficult or impossible to understand and evaluate. This contrasts with great philosophy, which, although it may deal with complex ideas and themes, is always based upon distinct, clear ideas which are subsequently built upon. Philosophy should never be overly rhetorical, or full of unnecessary arguments, hyperbole and oversights. Furthermore, a great philosopher always recognises their influences, paying close attention to and acknowledging the ideas of their predecessors and contemporaries, even if contrary to their own viewpoint. The philosopher who thinks their philosophy wholly original is usually being dishonest and is almost certainly wrong. However, a great philosopher’s ideas must be highly original nevertheless; developing and expanding on existing ideas in a decidedly innovative and momentous way. Most philosophers will never be as original as, say, René Descartes; but the philosopher whose ideas consist wholly of a hotchpotch of other peoples’ – or, worse, are derived from just one thinker – is a bad one.

To summarise: the worst philosopher’s ideas would constitute the worst of philosophy: lacking in analysis, disordered, prone to exaggeration, unimaginative, unoriginal, hardly philosophy at all.

So, who is ‘the worst philosopher’? It is difficult to say, as there are so many poor ones from whom to choose, and the decision will reflect your own personal interests and perspectives. But I would suggest **Ayn Rand** (1905-1982), whose endorsements of ethical egotism and *laissez-faire* capitalism are formulated in the overused, hubristic and indolent arguments characteristic of the worst of what can, at a stretch, be called ‘philosophy’.

JONATHAN TIPTON
PRESTON, LANCASHIRE

My first impulse is to stab a sacred cow: *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1844-1900). He tended to work from a position of fancy and romanticism, thinking that he was more ready for action than he really was. The accusation of fantasy stands to reason, given how sickly he was: think his ‘Will to Power’ and his ironically quoted-to-death epithet, “What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger.” However, my adverse sentiment towards him has more

to do with his many fans whom I have encountered on message boards: those basement *übermenschen*. Every time I encounter someone who tags their belief system with the prefix ‘anarcho-’, I think of Nietzsche, cringe, and start digging my trenches. It always feels like someone embracing the radical strictly for the sake of the radical. But perhaps this has more to do with the fact that, as easy as he is to read, Nietzsche is equally easy to misinterpret. The next logical choice, being a source of Nietzsche’s fancy, would be *Herbert Spencer* (1820-1903), for his Social Darwinism. But Spencer is too discredited to be worth wasting this opportunity to internationally air my contempt. Therefore I would turn towards a more recent expression of Spencer’s Social Darwinism: **Ayn Rand**. I do so because she has been a major influence on our social, economic, and political life; and she did so by appealing to the same fancy as Spencer and Nietzsche. Even worse, she attempted to drape that fancy in an erroneous appeal to the scientific method. As far as I can tell, her ‘Objectivism’ consisted of talking about facts (something we can all agree exist), then translating this into questionable causal connections about general matters of the human condition. Her argument boiled down to: ‘1+1=2: so *laissez faire* Capitalism is the only means by which humans can achieve their full potential’. It’s as if we’re supposed to be so impressed by her getting the ‘1+1’ part right that we should accept the latter claim as having the same status. We can achieve our true potential only by using our talents to make things better for everyone, not through the corporate servitude she promoted.

D.E. TARKINGTON
BELLEVUE, NEBRASKA

If by worst philosopher you mean the one whose ideas are furthest from the truth, a strong candidate must be **Bishop George Berkeley** (1685-1753). His key notion was that nothing exists except insofar as it exists as an idea in some mind. I have never been able to make any sense of this. Some of his modern disciples (like Bob Berman and Robert Lanza in their book *Biocentrism*, 2010) do seem to hold that the Moon’s existence literally depends on people looking at it. Meantime, Berkeley posited that ultimately it’s in the mind of God that everything exists. Yet the mind of God does not exist.

If, however, by ‘worst philosopher’, you mean the most pernicious, that’s surely **Friedrich Nietzsche**. Of course that does not refer to everything he wrote and others may have spouted worse vileness. In Nietzsche’s case, though, his perniciousness is leveraged by his outsized influence. Nothing so atrocious has been so widely read. My own humanist philosophy centers on the utilitarian concept of the greatest good for the greatest number.



It's not a moral absolute, but a guideline: striving for more happiness and less suffering in the world. By this reckoning, every human life counts. Nietzsche's thought is directly contrary: the greatest good for the greatest individuals, all others be damned, subservient to the ego of the heroic *übermensch* or 'Superman'. Nietzsche had contempt for the mass of humanity. It is one thing to vaunt virtuous human qualities such as courage and strength; quite another to claim that only certain lives have value. How does one make that portentous differentiation? Nietzsche's particular criteria are highly dubious. Indeed, one can argue that his *übermensch* is actually a criminal deserving punishment. Nobody should be allowed to condemn as worthless a whole class of human beings. That's exactly what the Nazis did in their campaign of slaughter. Nietzsche, fittingly, was their pet philosopher.

I prefer the humanistic thinking of T.H. Huxley (1825-1895), who said our aim should be not to play out Darwinian survival of the fittest, but to fit more of us for survival.

FRANK S. ROBINSON
ALBANY, NEW YORK

Judging philosophical ideas and thinkers as 'good' and 'bad' is an abyss even Nietzsche wouldn't be keen to stare into. The yardstick for separating good philosophical thinkers from bad isn't just sitting there waiting to be discovered. It certainly can't be based on right or wrong theories: how are Kantian ethics any truer than utilitarianism? Controversy can't be an indicator of quality, any more than cordiality. Judging philosophers seems like a lost cause – until you discover those who threatened the very foundation of the discipline, and eventually, of knowledge, and **Moritz Schlick** (1882-1936), leader of the Vienna Circle, is a prime example. Responsible for the Logical Positivist movement, the group of philosophers he led attempted to curtail the criteria of what was considered 'meaningful', and hence worthy of pursuit. Surely an offense like this shouldn't be pardoned.

At the base of logical positivism was the Principle of Verification, which says that only ideas capable of empirical verification are worth contemplating, or indeed, meaningful. Although a seemingly noble attempt to make better use of human time and effort, such stern conditions of meaning not only invalidate centuries of quality work contributed by exceptional thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, or Kant, but also throw out entire branches of philosophy, such as theology, ethics, and metaphysics, as 'speculative trash'. For any naturalists feeling smug here, however, the implications go far beyond philosophy, into science, where for instance, theories relating to quantum entanglement, dark matter, and M-theory would have to be thrown out if they cannot be shown to be empirically verifiable. Social sciences such as psychology and sociology would soon follow suit... leaving a void in the very foundation of knowledge, to the point where observation and experimentation of any kind would become impossible. Fortunately, the theory proved to be self-contradictory, with the Principle of Verification itself being not quite empirically verifiable. This crucial drawback not only establishes the idea as a complete failure, but also establishes Moritz Schlick and his dour band of companions as narrow-minded and unimaginative thinkers.

SHAIL THAKKER
EDGWARE, LONDON

There he sat night after night,
Enrobed in rustic country clothes,
Dreaming by a German fire,
In wooden hut, one man alone:
A king upon an Alpine throne –
The greatest thinker ever known.
Or was he? For though he wrote in gilded rose-tipped prose
And probed the heart of Being,
It was the cold, aloof, unfeeling being, himself – **Heidegger**
– he chose.

This man as the Nazi rector is more revealing:
He did not deny, denounce, nor denigrate
History's most anti-life:
And there his grand undoing lies
Like an existential hunting knife.
For it's all too dark, and all too true
As the voice from out the forest cries:
'Philosophy ends and thinking fails
When the human in us dies'.

BIANCA LALEH
TOTNES, DEVON

Since philosophy is the love of wisdom, the worst philosopher would be the one whose philosophy resulted in the greatest folly, which may be measured by human hurt. There are, unfortunately, numerous candidates for this dubious distinction, but my vote is for **Karl Marx** (1818-1883). Marx's philosophy led to the totalitarian communist regimes of Russia, China, and other countries, and so to the mass killings of more people than even fascism. Then Russia and its satellite countries had to abandon it, and China has had to greatly modify it. Further, Marx claimed that his theories were scientific and thus capable of predictions, but his mistaken predictions were so numerous that there is not space in this little essay to list them.

The foundation of Marx's thought was his philosophy of history, and it was here he made his fatal error. Briefly, his theory was that the means of production of goods and services determined human history. History moves by an inexorable process that divides societies into classes that must struggle against one another. Marx's good news is that the process must end with no social classes, and peace and justice for all. This theory is a *materialistic determinism*: according to this view, our ideas do not influence the process. And by 'our ideas', I include all of our art, customs and manners, moral principles, religion, laws, political organization, and philosophy. In other words, according to Marx, our lives are a macabre dance where human agency is a delusion.

I believe the opposite is the case. Humans are born curious. The evolutionary advantage of curiosity is that it enables learning to adapt to the world; and in our case, to greatly change it for our benefit – including our political and economic systems. In fact, after Marx, we've greatly changed capitalism, and accommodated within it some socialism. This is why Marx's predictions were wrong: he denied the efficacy of human agency in history. There was no place for it in his inexorable historical process. And there is no worse philosopher than one who believes that wisdom is impotent.

JOHN TALLEY
RUTHERFORDTON, NORTH CAROLINA



I nominate **John Maynard Keynes** (1883–1946) as the worst philosopher. One of his rare critics was the American economist Henry Hazlitt (1894–1993), who noted that while a small public library could be filled with books lavishly praising Keynes’ ideas, the number of critical works could be counted on one hand. Keynes’ *magnum opus*, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), is a convoluted thicket of supercilious jabs and straw-man arguments; I further nominate it for Worst Book Ever Written. I read it all though, and have no reason to doubt Hazlitt’s assertion, made in *The Failure of the New Economics: An Analysis of the Keynesian Fallacies* (1959), that he was “unable to find in [that book] a single important doctrine that is both true and original.”

Keynes’ ‘insight’ was that in the fable of ‘The Ant and the Grasshopper’, Aesop had got things backward. It was the *ant* who was impoverishing the world – by saving some of his earnings! The grasshopper, singing all summer and living from hand to mouth, was the more economically responsible citizen. Saving bad: spending good. This idea has now been accepted as gospel by almost all the economists and governments of the world.

Keynes’s popularity is based not on originality or on truth, but on his telling everyone what they want to hear: workers should spend everything they earn and never suffer a pay cut; governments should borrow money and print it too, in order to keep everyone at ‘full employment’. Keynes is less a philosopher than a guy who shows up with a bag of cocaine and says “Let’s party!”

PAUL VITOLS
NORTH VANCOUVER,
BRITISH COLUMBIA

If this question ‘Who is the worst philosopher?’ had not been prefaced with ‘out of the famous thinkers of history’, the logical answer might have been, *whoever came up with this question*, because, lacking a definition of terms, it is fundamentally meaningless. Does it mean, which philosopher do you or I most disagree with? That doesn’t define who is the ‘worst’ philosopher; merely which philosopher’s ideas you find most unconvincing. So followers of Ayn Rand will automatically nominate Karl Marx; and Marxists are likely to nominate Ayn Rand (or possibly Karl Popper). Or does it mean, which philosopher do you find most morally objectionable (never mind what you think about their ideas)? In that case the Nazi Martin Heidegger is likely to show up high on the list.

Still, in an attempt to answer both questions, I will offer two nominations. For muddled thinking, I would suggest **René Descartes** (1596–1650), simply because his physics – the famous vortices – is not only nonsense, but based on no scientific evidence. For his sheer hypocrisy, I propose **Seneca the Younger** (4BC–65AD), who preached stoicism while making a fortune and enjoying the luxury of Nero’s court – and, I would argue, only relapsed into stoicism by committing suicide when he couldn’t find any alternative.

MARTIN JENKINS
LONDON

Those Who Turn Away

Talented thinkers through the ages:
Some fail, and some fail to try.
We focus on the former,
Yet no one asks the latter why.

So who is the Worst Philosopher?
My brother John is a candidate strong.
And, no, I do not stereotype him,
So please don’t just say I’m wrong.

A double first at Oxford,
Laser physics is his thing.
Science gives him answers:
Philosophy’s praises he does not sing.

Yes, he’s a Doctor of Philosophy,
Although on him the irony is lost.
He says rationality is his god.
Philosophy? “No return, there’s only cost.”

His advice helped win a Nobel,
A successful professorial hit:
“Why sit and wait,
When you can get on with it?”

But thinking about thinking
And taking the measure of measure? –
All best left to others;
Those circles give no pleasure.

Science can help with consciousness
And what is meant by life,
But philosophy deserves disdain:
“Who needs the angst and strife?”

His dot-com career was fortunate,
Though he treats this view with scorn.
“The internet needed fibre optics.
Fast transmission, even if for porn”

So the Worst Philosophers
Are not the ones who try,
But **the ones who turn away**
And do nothing but decry.

GLEN REID
ROYAL WOOTTON BASSETT

The next question is: **What & Why Are Our Human Rights?**
Please give and justify your answer in less than 400 words. The prize is a semi-random book from our book mountain. Email the Editor. Subject lines should be marked ‘Question of the Month’, and must be received by 10th February 2020. If you want a chance of getting a book, please include your physical address. Submission is permission to reproduce your answer.



Montaigne
A ruff sketch by an
unknown artist, 1570.

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)

Brad Rappaport writes an essay on the inventor of the essay.

In order to understand Michel de Montaigne, one must understand his time; and yet, paradoxically, the reason why his *Essays* continue to be read down to our own day is on account of their timelessness.

Montaigne lived in the late sixteenth century, a time of faction and civil war in France. Protestantism had just arisen out of the ferment of ideas which had been brewing since the rediscovery of ancient texts during the time now known to us as the Renaissance, which had seen the flourishing of the arts in all their forms. Eventually, the success of the arts in such respects as the emergence of perspective in painting would be paralleled by developments in the sciences, leading, centuries later, to the Industrial Revolution. But at the time Montaigne was writing, such forces were just beginning to coalesce, and their birth was violent, with wars of religion breaking out across Europe.

Biography

Montaigne was born on February 28, 1533, before the outbreak of religious conflict in France. His world and the thinking of his culture was circumscribed by religion, in particular, Catholicism. Moreover, Montaigne held title to nobility – he was Lord of Montaigne – at a time when the Western world was still unquestioningly organized around the principles of monarchy and aris-

tocracy. The French Revolution lay two centuries in the future, and the majority of his contemporaries associated democracy with upheaval and mob rule, not the ordered and legitimate form of government with which it is associated today.

Several generations previously, a great-grandfather had made a fortune in business, and used it to buy the estate from which Michel de Montaigne would take his name – the family otherwise being known by the surname Eyquem. Some of Montaigne's ancestors were Jews. Under pressure from the Expulsion Order of 1492, if they cared to preserve their faith intact, Jews in Spain fled to the Ottoman Empire or elsewhere, while some remained in Spain and continued to practice in secret, or else converted. Those who chose to remain usually blended in with the surrounding society, losing their distinctive character. It is from some of this party that Montaigne was partly descended. (Although I have not read it remarked upon elsewhere, it seems to me that Montaigne's famous tolerance was part of his need to be authentic.) Montaigne sided with the Catholics in the wars of religion, putting him in an inherently conservative position; which is to say, he sought to preserve the existing order. However, he held the conflict itself in contempt, and savored time alone to write his *Essays*, partly out of resignation over an ultimate powerlessness to contribute meaningfully to its resolution.

Most of Montaigne's contemporaries had neither time nor education for personal pursuits and interests, as a nobleman might have. Although he did serve the public, whether in the parliament of Bordeaux, where he lived, or later as its mayor, this service should be construed as *noblesse oblige* – the obligation of a nobleman to the locality to which he belonged as a leading figure.

Montaigne's friendship with Étienne de la Boétie, ending with the latter's early death, is the stuff of legend. Much ink has been spilled by academics over the rise of subjectivity and the interior life in the early modern period, with the friendship between the two, who bonded over talk of ideas, being a set-piece in such discussions. He also married, and had a daughter.

One further biographical note about him: his father brought him up in a Latin-speaking environment from infancy. This doubtless accounts for his love of ancient Roman authors, on whom he principally draws for examples of the virtues which he himself has been judged by so many to exemplify.

Critical Review

In spite of his conservatism, Montaigne's book *Essays* (1580-95) is widely held to be the first of its kind. It is of a piece with the spirit of experimentation which would come to define the scientific mentality in the centuries that would follow. The *Essays* has 107 chapters in three volumes, covering all sorts of topics, ranging from smells to laws to pedantry. The last volume was published posthumously, in 1595. Perhaps what marks the *Essays* as unique for its time, and singular in its effect on writers who would follow it, is that it is a work of psychology. The introspectiveness and unorthodoxy of the *Essays* sets it apart from any other kind of record of one's activities which could have been found at the time.

It's an interesting endeavor in which Montaigne is engaged. In a preface he deprecates his own value as subject-matter, and proposes that his essays are really best read as an attempt to keep a record of his own character for the sake of his friends and family. Yet elsewhere in the work he takes long detours from the subject at hand to discuss his project of essay-writing. Not for scribes alone, or monks in their cells, his *repartee*! There is in this sense a somewhat unchristian ambition in the project of the *Essays*. Although he's always mordantly self-deprecating, it cannot have escaped him that he was taking a shot at the kind of renown which he well knew it is folly to fix one's self-estimation on achieving. Perhaps he had something of a romance with the printing press, invented only in the previous century, which itself had a major role to play in the ferment of ideas of the time.

What strikes the reader first about the *Essays* is that Montaigne is unsystematic. He has no intentions of circumscribing the world in a book. As I said, religion and the state already circumscribed his world, and he wrote of what he found within it. As a conservative, he shrank back from any prospect that the regular order of things, sustained by custom, could be upended by a radical attempt to re-organize it along artificial lines, which is to say, against the grain of habit. Montaigne gives due deference to religion, and does not dismiss accounts of the fantastical, such as feats of superhuman strength in ancient times or the testimony to miracles that are integral to Christianity. However, he is anything but a theologian. Much of the philosophy which succeeded the ancient world but which preceded Montaigne had about it the character of apologetic – sophisticated rationalizations as to why

one should believe in the manner expected of a Christian, Jew or Muslim. Montaigne, by contrast, is quite content to let the reader presume, based on what he has written, that he extends no credit to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul – provided that it's publically understood that he *does* credit it. He has no ambition to set himself up as a genius from whom others should take their bearings, for he knows full well that the ideas informing him come from outside of himself. It is from the security of a known world – the world of Church and throne – that he is able to turn his gaze inward and report on what he finds there. If what he finds seems to be at odds with what he avows as true as a good Catholic, so much the worse for what he finds; yet it does not cease to have been discovered, even if it contravenes revealed truth.

An Essay into the Essays

Montaigne had no illusions about the ultimate groundlessness of custom and habit as such. In his early essay 'On Prognostication', Montaigne quotes a Roman authority: "As for those who understand the language of birds and learn more from the liver of a beast than from their own thought, they should be heard, I think, rather than heeded." Indeed, in this essay he heaps scorn on those who would place their faith in divination. To those who point out the occasions on which a prediction has been vindicated he says in effect that even a broken clock is right twice a day. But in a later essay, he proves more yielding to the possibility of mysterious interpositions in human affairs, writing that "it is an absurd presumption to scorn and condemn as false what seems to us not probable", saying further that this presumption is an affliction common to those who think themselves superior to the common man. Here is his agnosticism at work. Montaigne is determined to remain open to the possibility of what is widely credited and reported, especially by those whom he esteems, such as Augustine. He constantly asks, 'What do I know?' Indeed, his biographers make much of his having adopted those words as his motto.

Montaigne's argument for openness to reports of the improbable is that even those things which are natural strike us as amazing if we have never seen them before. In an essay 'On A Child Monster', he gives the example of a child who has a second head and another set of arms. We now know this to be caused by the failure of twins to differentiate themselves in the womb. The explanation, of course, does not negate the improbability of the occurrence. Likewise, in 'On Conversation', Montaigne gives the examples of preferring to be the twelfth or fourteenth to arrive at a banquet rather than the thirteenth, and of putting on the left shoe before the right, and says that, weighed against the alternative of 'emptiness', he believes that such inclinations should be allowed. When it comes to affirming the attested miracles of the Christian faith, he confesses that it is obligatory to treat them as verities if we would honor tradition. Yet Montaigne is incontrovertibly correct when he says that there are some things which, by definition, we cannot know.

In his essay 'On Custom and the Inadvisability of Changing an Established Law', he writes of something he certainly did not fail to observe in his own case: "Peoples brought up in liberty, and to rule themselves, consider every other form of government monstrous and contrary to nature. Those who are accustomed to monarchy think in the same fashion." The reader with the conviction of our day, that liberal democracy is self-evidently the best

form of government, should take note. Yet lest he conclude that it is required by intellectual rigor that he abandon this conviction, let him note that Montaigne goes on as follows: "It is the rule of rules and the universal law of laws, that every one must obey those of the place where he is", quoting what my edition says is an unknown Greek source: "It is noble to obey the laws of the country in which one dwells." For all his devotion to Christianity and defense of the laws of France against innovation, Montaigne's commitment to absolutism is a function of this relativism.

Conclusion

There is much in custom that is indefensible from the perspective of reason, but the elevation of reason to a criterion against which custom should be judged, and, if not conformable to it, dismissed, is characteristic of a certain period of time. That time would find much to celebrate in Montaigne, on account of his willingness to investigate human nature fearlessly, regardless of religious orthodoxy. The difference between Montaigne and Enlightenment philosophers, however, is that he never drew the imperious conclusion they did, that religious orthodoxy can be dismissed. Montaigne's work thus resists the modernist presumption that philosophy can replace religion, and that religion is an antiquated relic which vanguard intellectuals know better than to credit.

On the contrary, in 'On Vanity' Montaigne writes that the "old theology and earliest philosophy" are best thought of as poetic in nature; yet he requires that we take this earliest material as grist for the mill of our own thinking. We are indebted to it; and the idea that religion (albeit the pagan religion of Homer and Socrates) could be dismissed by rigorous inquiry as anything other than germane, and urgently so, Montaigne would have regarded as disconnected from reality. The idea that we can get beyond our 'infancy', being of the self-same flesh as the earliest life and culture, is a delusion characteristic of the kind of religiosity from which the Enlightenment took itself to be a departure, even while mirroring it. Montaigne's *Essays* is, by Enlightenment standards, an antiquated survival, of the kind to which the Enlightenment saw itself as superior. Its author's authenticity, however, has caused the *Essays* to outlast the Enlightenment view that the role of religion can be confined to the past.

Montaigne's form of essay-writing influenced later thinkers, many of whom followed suit, including Francis Bacon, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. However, all three of these authors wrote philosophical, scientific or novelistic writings in addition to writing about themselves, whereas Montaigne had written about the humanities incidentally in the process of self-disclosure of an unusual kind. Nevertheless, his *Essays* played its part in the shift away from unexamined Aristotelianism towards the modern sciences, that is, from knowledge gleaned from ancient authority, to knowledge gleaned from experience, and then from experiment.

Montaigne, who mercilessly ridiculed the quack medicine of his day to the amusement of his readers, conceded that he would, at times, take a remedy just to please the doctor. He died at home on September 13, 1592, of quinsy, an illness of the tonsils which today we take for granted can be cured.

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Brad Rappaport is a civil servant in New York City, where he also makes his home.



SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR (1908–1986)

*Forced to be Other
Shaped to suit the ends of Man
Willingly enslaved(?)*

Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre formed the great double act or celebrity couple of existentialism. De Beauvoir was prolific as a novelist, essayist, biographer, critic and theorist, and was energetic as a political activist. She displayed her intellectual gifts from an early age, leading her proud father to boast, "Simone thinks like a man!"

De Beauvoir is perhaps best known for *The Second Sex* (1949), a work considered to be the pivotal feminist text of the twentieth century. The male, she wrote, has always been portrayed as the norm or standard of what it is to be human. In this way the female has ever been made out to be 'the Other', an inferior creation, often with the status of a mere object. To use her (very Sartrean) terms, the male is for-itself, while the female is simply in-itself – the male actively directs his gaze onto the world, while the female is the passive recipient of the gaze. Objectified, and deprived of the potential for self-creation, women are forced to fulfil roles which men determine for them: girl, wife, mother, prostitute....

However, de Beauvoir's initial analysis of this relationship had little sympathy for the plight of women. She accepted Sartre's belief that we're all possessed of absolute freedom – the idea that the 'slave in chains is as free as his master'. Women, therefore, were essentially responsible for their own slavery: rather than opt for transcendent freedom and the anxiety that accompanies it, they chose instead security, abdicating the burden of freedom.

To her credit, de Beauvoir later decided that this was perhaps a bit harsh, not to mention simplistic, idealistic, and just plain ludicrous. Just perhaps, she later said, individuals may be shaped by their social and cultural contexts, and this may, perhaps, have something to do with how they perceive themselves and their position in the world. What a thought!

Famously, de Beauvoir and Sartre had an 'open' relationship; but while each would regard the love of the other one as 'essential', their affairs with outsiders would be merely 'contingent'. De Beauvoir maintained that this suited her just fine – it allowed her the freedom she would never give up. Some have speculated it suited Sartre even better.

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Terence is a writer, historian, and lecturer, and lives with his wife and their dog in Paekakariki, NZ.



Emojivism



Sally Latham introduces a moral theory for millennials.

In ethics, emotivism is a *non-cognitivist* theory of moral language. It was advocated by David Hume (1711-1776), followed much later by, amongst others, A.J. Ayer. A non-cognitivist approach says moral judgments do not make factual claims that can be true or false. Instead of expressing beliefs about the way the world is, they express something else, usually taken to be feelings or desires. This contrasts with the *cognitivist* approach, which takes moral judgments to be making factual claims about the world that can be true or false, and hence expressing beliefs. In this article I will outline the reasoning behind emotivism before proposing a new understanding of this theory for the twenty-first century.

Hume

In Book III of *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1738), Hume argues that our moral judgments are not making reasoned claims about the way the world is. Morals have an influence on actions and feelings, and reason alone cannot have such an influence. We can never find the ‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness’ of an act by examining the act itself:

“Take any action that is agreed to be vicious – wilful murder for instance. Examine it in all lights and see if you can find the matter of fact or real existence that you call ‘vice’. However you look at it, all you’ll find are certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts; those are the only matters of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you as long as you examine the individual action, the murder. You can never find it until you turn your reflection into your own breast and find a sentiment of disapproval that arises in you towards this action.”

If we accept this, then we might compare vice and virtue to what John Locke called secondary qualities, such as sounds and colours; they are not qualities in the objects themselves but rather perceptions in the mind of the beholder. It would thus be more correct to speak of moral *feelings* than moral *judgments*.

Here lie the roots of emotivism, the theory that moral judgments do not have factual content but are expressions of emotions. ‘Murder is wrong’ becomes ‘Boo to murder!’ – and ‘Boo!’ is not a factual claim that can be true or false, but a reaction of disapproval to the murder. Someone who says ‘Hooray to murder!’ is not disagreeing about *the facts* in any sense, as both agree on the facts concerning murder. The difference is in the emotional reaction, and this presents no contradiction between any judgments.

Ayer

Ayer used his ‘verification principle’ to arrive at his own version of emotivism. The verification principle is a criterion of meaning. It says that to be a genuine statement of fact, a sentence must be either true by definition (that is, logically evident) or empiri-

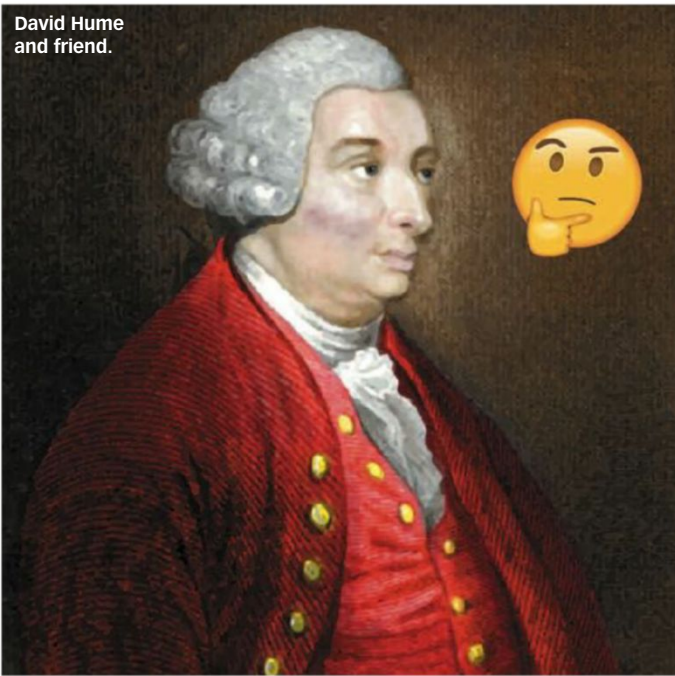
cally verifiable (scientific). As he argued in the book that shot him to fame, *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936): “a sentence is factually significant to any given person if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express – that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false.” If someone utters a statement that is neither tautological nor verifiable by experiences then, said Ayer, it is a “mere pseudo-proposition. The sentence may be emotionally significant to him, but it is not literally significant.”

Moral judgments are neither tautological nor verifiable. Suppose we define murder for instance as ‘the premeditated killing of another human being’. ‘Murder is wrong’ is not true by definition, as there is nothing in the definition of ‘murder’ that contains its moral wrongness, and it can be denied without contradiction. Nor can any sense-evidence be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood. What empirical evidence could you discover to show that murder is wrong? This means the statement ‘Murder is wrong’ is not significant in any literal sense.

Some cognitivists, such as G.E. Moore (1873-1958), said that ethical concepts such as ‘good’ were simple and unanalysable because they were a different, non-natural, sort of thing in the world. Ayer responded that ethical concepts were unanalysable because they were pseudo-concepts which had no real meaning: “They are expressions of emotions which can be neither true nor false.” According to Ayer, moral judgments are not propositions about the state of things but rather exclamations or commands designed to provoke the reader or listener to action of some sort. Ethical terms express feelings, but are also calculated to arouse feelings and so stimulate action. They are unverifiable for the same reason a cry of pain or a command is unverifiable – because they do not express genuine propositions. Imagine I put my hand into very hot water and swear loudly. My expletive is not a factual claim that can be true or false; rather, it is an emotional reaction to my experience of the hot water. It may also influence you not to put your hand in the water. In the same way, if I were to witness a murder and say “*@\$! murder!”, this would be an emotional reaction of disapproval, perhaps also intended to discourage the hearer from murdering.

Hume and Ayer agree that it is impossible to cross the ‘is-ought’ gap which separates facts from values. We make such a move regularly, but they argue that it’s a mistake to think that such a move has any basis in reason or logic. I may see one man steal another’s property (fact) then say “He ought not to have stolen it” (value) – but this is a purely emotional response, not one based on any reasoning. Facts and values are totally different and the latter cannot be derived from the former. So according to Ayer, if I say, “Stealing money is wrong”, then the ‘is wrong’ part expresses a value that cannot be derived from the fact that people steal, and adds nothing factual to the statement.

David Hume and friend.



What ‘is wrong’ actually serves to do, is show disapproval. But there’s nothing more to it than if I had said “Stealing money!!!” in a loud tone of horror.

Picture This

That’s emotivism then. Let me now offer a new interpretation of emotivism whereby the expression “Boo!”, the tone of horror, the exclamation marks etc, are replaced by that curse of modern day communication... the emoji.

The dictionary definition of an emoji is ‘a small digital image or icon used to express an idea or emotion in electronic communication’. They’re used to add emotional responses to expressions of fact; and yet I would argue that they convey no factual information themselves. Rather, just like moral judgments under the emotivist view, they express emotion and attempt to evoke it in others with the view to influencing action. Interestingly, it has been argued that Ludwig Wittgenstein introduced the concept of the emoji when he argued that pictorial representations can convey more information than language. In a 1938 lecture at Cambridge he claimed: “If I were a good draughtsman, I could convey an innumerable number of expressions by 4 strokes.” It is likely that Wittgenstein was thinking about more flexibility in pictorial representation than our current emojis allow, but that doesn’t affect the argument here.

Let’s take an example of a text message:

You missed your philosophy class today.

By adding an emoji we can express either approval or disapproval to this fact:

You missed your philosophy class today. 😊

You missed your philosophy class today. 😞

You missed your philosophy class today. 😡

Both the sad face emoji and the angry face emoji are equivalent to ‘you ought not to have’ in moral discourse.

There is no factual dispute between the people who added the different emojis. If we say ‘murder is wrong’ or ‘murder is right’, then according to what I would like to call ‘emojivism’ this is no more than:

Murder 😊

Murder 😞

Or perhaps:

Murder 😡

My emoji is intended to arouse a similar feeling in you, but there is no truth or falsity to any use of them.

Interestingly, Ayer did refer to ‘wrong’ and ‘right’ as ethical symbols. He said: “The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to the factual content.” If we replace ‘symbol’ with ‘emoji’, and ‘proposition’ with ‘text’, then I think we have emojivism: “The presence of an ethical emoji in a text adds nothing to the factual content.”

Potential Criticisms

One criticism of emotivism is an issue with all non-cognitivist theories: if there is no truth or falsity to moral judgments, how can there be any moral discussion or debate? I say ‘Hooray!’ and you say ‘Boo!’ (or I text ☺ and you text ☹), and that is the end of the matter.

Ayer addresses this criticism by saying that we can dispute facts, and this is usually what moral disputes come down to: one person may have miscalculated the consequences of a certain act, for example. But if we agree on the facts and disagree about moral value then we must abandon attempts to convince each other otherwise. As Ayer wrote, “It is because argument fails us when we come to deal with pure questions of value, as distinct from questions of fact, that we finally resort to mere abuse.” (This is strangely familiar when it comes to social media.) To illustrate using emojivism: we can debate the facts about eating meat – for example, do animals feel pain? Does eating meat provide health benefits? Is it bad for the environment? – but if we agree on all the facts and then end up with:

Eating meat 😊

Eating meat 😞

then that’s the end of the matter.

In summary, Ayer’s theory of ethical terms as symbols adding nothing to the content of the facts to which they are attached fits well with the idea of emojis as ethical terms. This leaves us with the somewhat troubling conclusion that ‘wrong’ is no more than ☹. But I think Ayer would be ☺ with that.

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Sally Latham is a Philosophy lecturer at Birmingham Metropolitan College A Level Centre. She would like to dedicate this article to her students there, past and present.

Bertrand Russell & Common Sense for Savages

Stephen Leach considers what Bertrand Russell thought about common sense & reality – and how the one does not necessarily show you the other.

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) believed that reality is knowable, but ordinary language is apt to deceive us as to its nature. For example, an assertion about ‘the present king of France’ is understandable, but ‘the present king of France’ does not denote an entity in the real world, and so anything said about ‘him’ that implies his existence will be false. Misleading assertions such as these are likely to entangle the unwary philosopher; but, Russell believed, an ideal language, discovered through careful logical analysis and rigorously applied, would prevent us from being deceived.

At the turn of the twentieth century he set out to formulate this ideal language, at the same time attempting to demonstrate that mathematics is reducible to logic and that both mathematics and logic refer to real entities. Although Russell’s ultimate ambition was never achieved – reality, logic, and mathematics remain separated – he made enormous contributions to the study of logic along the way, and also came some way towards his ideal language, by helping to develop predicate logic. Moreover, on the way, Russell helped inspire a new way of doing philosophy. He is one of the Founding Fathers of the analytic tradition, one of the main characteristics of which, to this day, is an awareness of the deceptiveness of language. There is a determination in the analytic tradition to be clear and unambiguous – a determination that some might argue is sometimes (or often) carried a bit too far. An essay written with determinedly unambiguous language does not always make for the easiest of reading. However, in Russell’s case, in both his technical writings on logic and in his more popular works, the clarity of his language is matched by the elegance of his expression.

Given his view of the misleading nature of ordinary language, one might expect Russell to have been extremely wary of common sense, which after all is invariably expressed in ordinary language. However that is not quite Russell’s view. In fact, as A.J. Ayer points out, a consistent characteristic of Russell’s career is that he looked for reasons for accepted beliefs: “In the course of his long career, Russell... has held quite a large variety of philosophical opinions... But the fact is that, while he has fairly often changed his views on points of detail, his approach to philosophy has been remarkably consistent. His aim has always been to find reasons for accepted beliefs, whether in the field of mathematics, natural or social science, or common sense” (*Metaphysics and Common Sense*, 1969, p.179). That is not to say that in metaphysics Russell regarded accepted beliefs as a criterion of truth. Far from it: he fully realised that accepted beliefs and conventional wisdom might simply reflect a contingent environment:

“The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reason.”

(Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 1912, p.91)

Common sense may supply a starting point, but is not a criterion of truth.

However, in his journalism on social and political questions – which he sharply distinguished from his more technical philosophy – Russell was less critical: “I am prepared to admit the ordinary beliefs of common sense, in practice if not in theory” (*Sceptical Essays*, 1928, p.12). His journalism contains plenty of approving and unquestioning references to common sense – including *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare* (1959), in which Russell presents himself as the champion of common sense. In this respect, in his journalism Russell followed in the footsteps of Thomas Paine, whose pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776) accelerated the advent of American independence. What Paine with false modesty told his readers was common sense was not actually common sense until they read his pamphlet and were convinced it was. The same applies to Russell. He claimed to speak on behalf of common sense, but, in doing so, he was doing no more than attempting to prejudice his readers in his favour. It’s a rhetorical move which has been pervasive in political debate ever since the Enlightenment.

Metaphysical Savaging

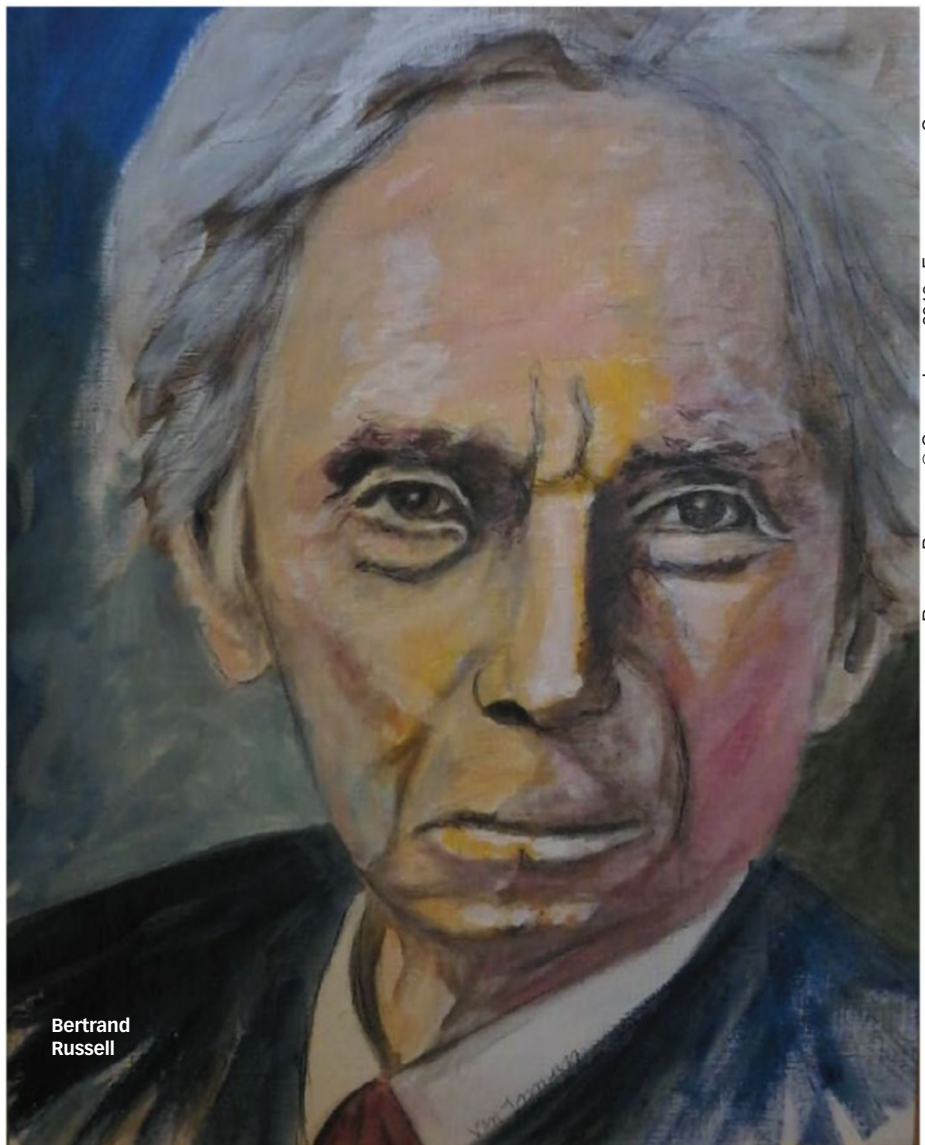
However, this tolerance of common sense as *at least* providing the starting point of an investigation does not seem to chime with one of the most famous of Russell quotations: “Common sense is the metaphysics of savages.” Intrigued by this disparity, I have searched for the original source of this quotation. It seems to first occur not in Russell’s writings, but in a paraphrase of Russell’s views by the American theologian Douglas Clyde MacIntosh, in 1915.

MacIntosh was commenting on the views expressed in Russell’s book *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914). Two years earlier, in *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell had argued that we infer the existence of the physical world from our sense experiences. That is to say, the existence of the physical world is accepted because it provides the best inferred explanation of our experiences. But in 1914, in *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Russell argues that objects are not inferred from but are actually constituted of actual and possible sense data. That is to say, he argued that physical objects are, in fact, no more than

collections of actual and possible immediate sensory impressions. Russell's earlier view was *dualist*, in that it acknowledged a fundamental difference between mental content and the physical world. His new view was *monist*, in that it acknowledged no such gap: the world is made of just one type of stuff. This tallied with Russell's view that all knowledge derives from experience, and it is also attractive because, all else being equal, a simpler explanation is preferable to a more complicated explanation (Ockham's Razor). Russell argued that to *infer* the existence of the physical world independently of our collections of actual and possible sense data is an unnecessary step. An independent physical world may be the common sense view, but it is unnecessary. Thus, looking back to his earlier view, Russell became dismissive of common sense: "Physics started from the common-sense belief in fairly permanent and fairly rigid bodies... This common-sense belief, it should be noticed, is a piece of audacious metaphysical theorising... We have thus here a first departure from the immediate data of sensation... probably made by our savage ancestors in some very remote prehistoric epoch" (*Our Knowledge of the External World*, p.107). Russell also believed that his new view avoids the problem of radical scepticism – the problem of not being able to know whether the physical world actually exists or whether it is only created by the mind. For, he argued, on his new view there is no reason to believe that sense data cannot exist when they are not perceived.

In response, MacIntosh made it clear that he much preferred Russell's earlier explanation of the physical world. In MacIntosh's opinion, this earlier explanation may have had problems, but it remains, after all, closer to common sense and so should not be so quickly rejected. He summarised Russell's metaphysical move from 1912 to 1914 as follows:

"The common sense notion of fairly permanent things, recognised as being a construction, not a datum, is now rejected as 'the metaphysics of savages'. By the use, it is claimed, of 'Occam's razor', the inferred entities of common sense are replaced by compounds, or classes, or series of sense-data... The main criticism to be made against Russell's philosophy at this point



is that he has swung from absolute dualism to an absolute monism in epistemology, because he saw no other way of escape from an almost total agnosticism with reference to the physical world. The desperation of his former condition is reflected in the desperate remedy to which he has had recourse, cutting himself off absolutely from common sense, for which offence he salves his conscience by applying to the common sense view the epithet, 'metaphysics of savages'."

(Douglas Clyde MacIntosh, *The Problem of Knowledge*, 1915, p.243)

It is easy to see how the confusion over the quotation occurred, for a reader of MacIntosh might naturally assume that the phrase in inverted commas is Russell's. But, these are not inverted commas in the sense of quotation marks; they are actually 'scare quotes'.

Admittedly, what Russell says in *Our Knowledge of the External World* does amount to the idea that concerning the nature of reality, *in this instance* "common sense is the metaphysics of savages" – but he does not claim that *all* common sense beliefs should, by their very nature, be immediately ruled out of court as intellectually primitive. Common sense may at least supply a starting point.

In his political campaigns, Russell was prepared to present himself as the spokesman of common sense. And in his philosophical work, Russell may not have been quite as dismissive of common sense as the famous 'quotation' would have us believe.

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Stephen Leach is honorary senior fellow at Keele University and co-editor, with James Tartaglia, of *The Meaning of Life and the Great Philosophers* (Routledge, 2018).

The Astrobiological Cat

Predrag Slijepcevic questions standard views of intelligence by thinking on an evolutionary scale.

In one of its 1995 issues a little-known newsletter, *Bioastronomy News*, published a memorable debate between two famous scientists. The echos of that debate still reverberate, in places from the *New York Times* to modern scientific journals and books. On one side of the argument was celebrated astrophysicist Carl Sagan (1934-1996); on the other, respected biologist Ernst Mayr (1904-2005). The topic of the debate was the validity of the research programme known as the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, or SETI.

According to Sagan, nature rewards smartness. He eloquently argued that the unimaginable vastness of the Milky Way and the huge number of stars with potentially habitable planets in it means it must contain other civilisations that, like ours, have discovered electromagnetic waves. By using radio telescopes, and with a bit of luck, we might be able to detect the radio wave traces of distant civilisations with which we share the convergent quality known as intelligence. The long-anticipated rendezvous with our cosmic neighbours may come to fruition one day.

Mayr, on the other hand, expressed deep doubts about the chances of SETI finding anything. His basic argument was that intelligence of the human type must be extremely rare; so rare, indeed, that the probability of two human-level civilisations sharing coordinates of space and time from which they could communicate with or even reach each other is negligible. From the evolutionary perspective, in which success is measured by the survival of the gene line, it is more advantageous to be stupid than smart, Mayr argued. Bacteria – which we generally see as rather stupid organisms – survive all sorts of planetary catastrophes, while smartness of the human type is actually an *obstacle* to evolutionary longevity. Bigger brains means more sophisticated tools and technologies; and sophisticated technologies generate existential risks such as nuclear war, genocidal plague, or environmental self-destruction.

The theme of this article is not SETI but intelligence on the evolutionary scale. The debate between Sagan and Mayr is a good introduction to this topic because it captures nicely two approaches to the problem of intelligence, Sagan's anthropocentric approach, and Mayr's more general approach. Either approach, on its own, is incomplete. Only when combined can they be useful in the interpretation of intelligence as an evolutionary phenomenon. The product of this complementarity is a

metaphor I have called *the astrobiological cat*, from the proverb, *When the cat's away, the mice will play*. Let's find out who's the cosmic cat, and who are the mice.

Anthropocentric & Artificial Intelligence

Definitions of human intelligence will always be contentious. Perhaps the least controversial way of defining intelligence is through analysis and measurement of the components that make it up: learning, reasoning, and the ability to manipulate symbols. Learning is a process of acquiring knowledge. Reasoning is the ability to draw valid conclusions from acquired knowledge. The ability to learn and reason is possible because we have the ability to manipulate symbols, which is the heart of both language and mathematics.

Another way of defining intelligence is related to its purpose. What's the purpose of our ability to manipulate symbols? A simple answer, according to the leading futurist Ray Kurzweil, is that intelligence allows its owner to develop strategies for achieving and improving her goals (*The Age of Intelligent Machines*, 1992). In biology, goals are defined in relation to the ability of individual organisms or species to survive. It is not yet possible to know with certainty whether intelligence serves to increase evolutionary fitness, but we may conclude that our intelligence helps us achieve such goals as economic, social, or scientific success.

Kurzweil goes on to suggest that the peak of human intelligence is the ability to create intelligent machines. As we know from modern AI research, machine intelligence constantly advances. By contrast, human intelligence remains the same. From this we can conclude that machine intelligence will overcome human intelligence in the near future, and become a superior form of life. In AI circles this is known as the technological singularity or intelligence explosion.

While evolution took 3.8 billion years to create humanity, the most intelligent species our planet has so far known, we have needed incomparably less time to create intelligent machines – who will in all likelihood soon surpass us in many ways. In this trajectory of intelligence-based creativity, we beat evolution, and intelligent machines will equally beat us, argued the Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom in his book *Superintelligence*. Bostrom's colleague Huw Price dubbed the anticipated future dominance of the machine intelligence the 'Machinocene' era, as opposed to the

Anthropocene, the current era of the human transformation of the planet. Kurzweil goes further, and predicts that machines will turn the Earth into a gigantic computer by the year 2099, and that this will open the door for the computerization of the cosmos.

Biocentric Intelligence

Modern biology is under the heavy influence of neo-Darwinism, a combination of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection with genetics. For neo-Darwinian biology, evolution is a blind and mindless process. Any hint of 'intelligence' in this process looks suspiciously purpose-oriented, almost Aristotelian.

The neo-Darwinian narrative set out by Richard Dawkins and others goes like this. Assemblies of genes called *genotypes* (as embodied in DNA) produce particular traits or *phenotypes* in living organisms such as bacteria, plants, giraffes, humans. Competition then ensures the selection of the organic traits best adapted to the environment. Adaptability is judged by *fitness*, which is measured by the number of descendants produced by possessors of an organic trait. The mechanism behind adaptability is gene mutation, which fine-tunes the phenotypes, the forms of organisms, and in this way gives both the genotypes and the phenotypes evolutionary longevity. Evolution is thus a blind game played between genes and the natural environment. Organisms are passive, dumb puppets (or in the words of Richard Dawkins, 'lumbering robots') controlled by these two powerful evolutionary forces.

However, the neo-Darwinian picture is not universally accepted. Biological innovation does not have to be the result of gene mutations, and survival is not only the result of competition. The first biologist who successfully rebelled against the neo-Darwinian view was Lynn Margulis (1938-2011). She was famous for popularising the concept of *symbiogenesis*. According to this, innovation can also happen by the merging of two or more microbes into one – the very process from which all plants and animals descended. The merging of organisms is known as *symbiosis*, meaning 'living together'.

Margulis's critique of neo-Darwinism (celebrated in a recent documentary film, *Symbiotic Earth: How Lynn Margulis Rocked the Boat and Started a Scientific Revolution*), encouraged a grow-

ing number of biologists and philosophers of biology to think outside the neo-Darwinian box, and also to analyse intelligence on the evolutionary scale.

Contrary to standard neo-Darwinian views, intelligence seems a biological universal. Organisms, from bacteria to elephants, are not passive 'lumbering robots', but instead are active learners, who actively construct their environments. Recent scientific papers are replete with terminology which suggests that (i) Organisms are agents, and (ii) Evolution is a cognitive process. Here are some relevant terms: 'bacterial IQ'; 'bacterial cognitive toolkit'; 'plant intelligence'; 'bacterial linguistics'; 'language of the bees'; 'plant language'; 'bacterial internet'; 'zoo-pharmacognosis'; 'honeybee democracy'; 'ant agriculture'; and so on. The increasingly intelligence-based view of evolution is often referred to as 'evolutionary epistemology'. It reminds me of the famous remark by Karl Popper that there is little difference between Einstein and an amoeba in terms of their restless quest for knowledge. Another philosopher, W.V.O. Quine (1908-2000), put forward the idea of 'naturalised epistemology'. And backing up the view that biological intelligence is at the very centre of evolution, Cambridge University Press has recently published the first dedicated natural epistemology book, *The Systems View of Life*, by Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi (2014).

Life: A Synthesis of Energy & Matter

The systems view of life interprets intelligence as an integral part of the process of life. This emerging branch of biology opens up a new possibility that I call *biocivilisations*.

The concept of biocivilisations is simple. Each species intelligently recreates its own surroundings – the equivalent of a species-specific civilisation – by actively constructing its environment. For example, in the beginning, bacteria turned the dead planet Earth into a living world fit for diverse organisms. This amazing transformation required natural skills such as communication (bacterial language), construction (for example, the oxygenation of the atmosphere) and computation (for example, 'natural calculation' behind the carbon cycle, controlled by bacteria). The primordial bacterial 'civilisation' became the basis for the entire biosphere, which was gradually



enriched by millions of new species and their own ‘civilisations’, all emerging from the bacterial world.

This said, the concept of biocivilisations is a great challenge to Sagan’s and Mayr’s visions of intelligence. We can see this by considering the origins and development of biocivilisations.

One ordinary cosmic energy factory – a star we call the Sun – found its first biological partner, photosynthetic bacteria or cyanobacteria, on the microcosmos of a minor planet we call Earth, roughly three billion years ago. The result was photosynthesis, a process that to this day fuels life on Earth. The light-energy radiated by the Sun travels 150 million km until a small portion of it reaches the Earth. At the end of the journey a photon from that great flow of energy finds a partner structure inside the wall of a cyanobacterium, from which it dislodges one electron. In a convoluted chemical process that takes place in the membranous structure of the bacterial wall, this electron creates a chemical gradient known as a proton pump. This pump harvests the useful energy, and converts it into the universal energy currency of the biosphere, a molecule called adenosine triphosphate or ATP, which enables many biological reactions to happen, including the operation of muscles in human bodies.

Over time this Sun-cyanobacteria partnership became the complex biological system we call the biosphere, producing all the plants and animals, including us. The biosphere is an open thermodynamic system, meaning that it constantly exchanges matter, energy, and information with its cosmic surroundings. Life was born within the Earth’s dead matter on the waves of the Sun’s thermodynamic storm. We are temporary and fragile surfers on the thermodynamic storm of life, like the riders on the storm from the Doors song. And bacteria are the basis of the biosphere. Lynn Margulis understood this better than anyone else when she helped James Lovelock explain how bacteria maintain Earth’s biosphere.

A New Understanding Of Intelligence

This narrative reveals several new qualities that can be associated with biological intelligence. First, bacteria are an intelligent cosmic ‘player’ in the sense that they detect and respond to cosmic electromagnetic waves. It’s as if they’re doing their own SETI! Bacteria detect that part of the electromagnetic spectrum we call visible light, within a wavelength range of about 400–700 nm. They then transform the light energy into useful work, which in the long evolutionary process created the biosphere.

The biosphere can be thought of as a giant bacterial super-organism that envelops the planet, even going deep into its surface. We can perhaps best imagine it as a sort of planetary biological cloud. The microbiologist Sorin Sonea (1920–2017) suggested that this bacterial planetary cloud is intelligent because it possesses an information-exchange network, in the form of a planetary ‘free market’ for bacterial genes. If there is a bacterial lineage anywhere on Earth in search of a specific gene, it will find it and acquire it in a complex process of genetic exchange. This was thought of by Sonea as a sort of ‘natural mind’ at work. Eshel Ben-Jacob (1962–2015), a physicist and microbiologist, not only thought that the bacterial planetary superorganism possesses a natural mind, but also that it carries out acts of natural computation which are at the core of the biosphere’s self-regulation – the biogeochemical cycles of organic

elements. A leading microbiologist, James Shapiro, further believes that bacteria are more sophisticated than humans ‘in controlling complex operations’.

A second important novelty is the strangeness of the bacterial universe. In our universe, we are the most significant species. But when we see things from the perspective of the bacterial world, we become insignificant. To some philosophers of biology, in the bacterial world all large organisms, such as plants and animals, are ‘macrobes’ within the microbial (that is, bacterial) network. Macrobes are bacterial chimeras. For example, on this view, photosynthesis is still carried out by bacteria, which are now parts of the macrobes we call plants. All macrobes have microbiomes, bacterial ecosystems, without which they cannot survive. And all macrobes, including us, are bacterial vectors: organisms to transport bacteria. When a bird is flying, its microbiome is in the sky too. When we fly into the cosmos, our bacteria travel with us. Scientists have shown that the International Space Station is contaminated with bacteria from our microbiome. Attempts to decontaminate the Station will surely remain unsuccessful. If we create human settlements on distant planets, bacteria will be there as well. If such colonies fail, the bacteria they brought will continue the mission of the survival of life – for bacteria can survive any new environment, unlike us. The good news is that the two universes, human and bacterial, are not mutually exclusive. Our biosphere is a kind of collage of biological worlds that depend on one another.

The third novelty is the poverty of neo-Darwinism when it comes to interpreting intelligence. Ernst Mayr’s claim that on the evolutionary scale it is better to be stupid than smart is false. The claim betrays the rigidly neo-Darwinian treatment of microbes: bacteria are lower organisms than plants and animals, and the most primitive forms of life. As we have seen, however, many biologists who do not follow the neo-Darwinian narrative consider bacteria intelligent: they just have a different definition of ‘intelligence’ – as meaning, say, ‘integrated problem solving’. These biologists clearly disagree with Mayr. To them, if there is stupidity on planet Earth, it’s certainly not associated with bacteria.

The fourth novelty is the fallacy of the views that *Homo sapiens* is at the top of biological intelligence, and that it has surpassed evolution. Kurzweil’s prediction that the Earth will become a gigantic computer by the year 2099 is eclipsed by the fact that natural computation on a planetary scale has existed for billions of years, in the form of the bacterial regulation of cycles of carbon, nitrogen, and other organic elements.

Any doubt of bacterial dominance on the planetary scale is dispelled by scientists from California and Japan in a recent study in *Nature Microbiology* 1, ‘A New View of the Tree of Life’ (Laura A. Hug *et al.*, 2016: see [nature.com/articles/nmicrobiol201648](https://www.nature.com/articles/nmicrobiol201648)). They used modern genomics and mainframes to reconstruct the ‘tree of life’ by analysing DNA samples from numerous locations scattered around the planet. The result was unequivocal. By far, the most dominant group of organisms on the contemporary tree of life are bacteria.

Cosmic Zoology

We can finally focus on the astrobiological cat metaphor. Bacteria, or more precisely the planetary superorganism of bacteria, are/is the dominant biogenic factor on the cosmic scale,



Bacteria's next step in the conquest of the universe: The International Space Station.

being a biological structure that looms over the planet. Moreover, bacteria have existed for 3.8 billion years, which is for most of the existence of the Earth itself, and over a quarter of the duration of the entire cosmos. Sagan's idea of intelligence glorifies the human version of it regardless of its relative insignificance on the temporal scale, and regardless also of the fact that bacteria can 'read' a portion of the electromagnetic spectrum just as well as we can. Mayr's idea also denies any hint of intelligence to bacteria, and reserves it exclusively for *Homo sapiens*.

Although it has been in control of planetary life since its inception 3.8 billion years ago, the bacterial superorganism is invisible to us. This invisibility gives rise to the false notion that humans are the masters. However to a biologist like me, influenced by a systems view of life, this situation is reminiscent of the old proverb *When the cat's away, the mice will play* – with one important difference: the cat is not absent, but invisible. Hence, *the astrobiological cat* – by which I mean the 'invisible' planetary cloud of bacteria that has been controlling planetary life for billions of years with its natural mind. The control is benign enough to allow all sorts of proverbial mice.

Why is this astrobiological cat so unnoticeable that its apparent absence allows us mice a disproportionate sense of our own importance? I strongly believe that the neo-Darwinian paradigm, which focuses on macrobes (in particular animals) and almost completely ignores microbes, is to blame for this blindness of the mice. Neo-Darwinian biology needs deep reforms in order to deal with new challenges, such as a wider biological definition of intelligence. The reforms have already begun through research programmes such as biosemiotics, evolutionary epistemology and the like, all gathered within the emerging discipline of the systems view of life.

The astrobiological cat metaphor also has some practical applications. I see two research avenues originating from it. The first is related to the bacterial superorganism, the microbial

cloud that contains its own mind I call the bacterial internet (see theconversation.com/microbes-have-their-own-version-of-the-internet-75642). Estimates show that the total number of bacteria that form the cloud of life is about 10^{30} . However, bacteria are not the most abundant microbes on Earth. The most numerous biogenic structures on Earth are viruses. For each bacterium, there are at least ten viruses. What's the role of viruses in the planetary microbial network? The only useful clue, for now, is the idea of a planetary free market of genes, which enables the bacterial superorganism to perform all the necessary processes involved in biogeochemistry. Viruses are pieces of inert genetic information protected by a biological membrane. Each is like a message in a bottle floating through the bacterial sea until it finds the appropriate bacterium, and helps it in the search for biological innovation.

The other potential avenue is related to SETI. My suggestion is that a new way of thinking should be incorporated into SETI, overcoming any anthropocentric bias, to see how life as an intelligent biogenic process can spread into cosmos. As bacterial vectors, we macrobes undoubtedly play an important role in this process. The two universes, microbial and macrobial, are not mutually exclusive. Together, they form a multiverse useful for both groups of species. SETI should accept this biological reality.

As Margulis argued in her book *Symbiotic Planet* (1999), bacteria will almost certainly outlive the human species. Macrobes like us are relatively transient biological forms – temporary structures gone with the evolutionary wind like dust. Contrary to our anthropocentric bias, only bacteria live forever. The best evidence for this claim is the fact that bacteria are as old as life itself.

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Predrag Slijepcevic is a Senior Lecturer in Biology at Brunel University, London. He'd like to dedicate this article to admirers of bacterial civilisation Lynn Margulis and Sorin Sonea, who believed that bacteria and archaea are one species.

Lies, Damn Lies & Santa Claus

Joe Biehl argues that we have excellent reasons to believe in Santa.

A growing chorus of people to whom I will refer, if solely for the sake of convenience, as ‘Grinches’, proclaim the sad tidings: Santa does not exist. Furthermore, they say to encourage the belief that he does exist amounts to lying, and is therefore wrong. This is becoming a depressingly regular feature of the festive season; Each year brings with it some new article or opinion piece mirthlessly insisting on the moral culpability of parents who abuse the trust of their all-too-suggestible children. I would like to believe that these Grinches’ efforts go mostly unheeded, but we live in somewhat uncertain times, at least as far as our relationship to truth is concerned, so taking countermeasures against this misguided moral war against Santa seems prudent.



IMAGE FROM HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS © UNIVERSAL PICTURES 2000

There are indeed important ethical ramifications to believing in Santa, but they are not what the Grinches suppose. The ethics of belief calls on us not to renounce Santa, but to become his faithful helpers.

The Grinch’s argument is a simple one, resting on two seemingly straightforward, and, so far as the Grinches are concerned, unassailable claims. The first and more pivotal concerns truth; namely that truth is the norm of belief. Truth is said to be the standard that guides believing, and so a belief is correct if and only if it is true. The second, and related, claim, is that a lie is the result of a person asserting what they believe to be false with the intent to mislead and manipulate their audience into believing it to be true. As such, lying is wrong; if not always then very often. Given that there is no Santa (or so the Grinches insist), to tell children that he exists with the intent of having them believe that he does, is therefore to lie. Given that lying is wrong, perpetuating the ‘Santa myth’ is wrong. Q.E.D.

And yet many of us persist in telling children about Santa. Are we immoral to do so? Of course not, and it is philosophically interesting to see why.

One explanation that readily suggests itself is that the Santa case involves the sort of lie that isn’t wrong: it’s just a harmless fib, or a bit of make-believe that’s all in good fun. This take is

bolstered by the fact that there seem to be very few people who harbor any resentment that their parents indulged their belief in Santa, in contrast with how we normally react when we realize that someone has intentionally deceived us, which is with feelings of betrayal and anger. Far from responding with bitterness, kids who outgrow their belief in Santa often become allies with parents in perpetuating the belief among younger siblings and other children. Tellingly, the prevailing sentiment is that in this case it is those who actively attempt to shatter illusions and shine the brilliant light of truth that are in the wrong, not those that joyously keep the lore alive.

These are important pieces to my puzzle, but I will resist inferring from them the conclusion that the Santa story is a special sort of permissible lie. These features of our behavior suggest something much more interesting is going on, and to begin to recognize it we need to set aside the thought that we are dealing with a lie. On the contrary, my belief in Santa is *certainly* true. What obscures this is the philosophically respectable-sounding but ultimately empty claim that truth is ‘the norm of belief’.

We do well to be skeptical of any proposed standard that cannot, in principle, be specified. But what, exactly, is the nature of the truth that is to guide our belief? Is it correspondence to reality? Is it membership in a maximally coherent set of beliefs? Is it to be particularly useful for the purposes of action? Or perhaps one of the many other analyses of the property ‘true’ that philosophers have proposed? Depending on the answer given here, the set of possible beliefs which count as true might well be different. We shall never know which, however, since these are questions that lie beyond the limits of logical inquiry. Consider this. To establish the truth about truth requires a sound argument: not just logically valid, but also with true premises. This means that a sound argument about truth requires that both its premises and conclusion be true. But how can you know that they’re true unless you’ve already established what truth is? In every attempt to define truth “one goes round in a circle,” as the logician Gottlob Frege observed, concluding that “it is probable that the content of the word ‘true’ is unique and undefinable” (‘The Thought’, p.291, *Mind*, July 1956).

An inscrutable guide is no guide at all. Little wonder then that we find our paths diverging as we go about piecing together our views on reality. But being unsurprising doesn’t make it any less frustrating. The thought that our beliefs should conform to the way things are independently of those beliefs is as intuitive as it is comforting. Confirming conformity to such a standard, however, would require the impossible: an independent comparison between our beliefs and the reality which they purport to be about.

But the impossibility of truth as a functional standard for belief is not its most objectionable feature. Asserting that truth is the norm of belief implies that the truth is out there, existing independently of our belief. While this inference is plausible when thinking about silver and gold, whiskey and wine, and the

presents under the tree, for vast stretches of our realities it isn't plausible at all. The parts I have in mind here are those parts that matter most to us and imbue our lives with meaning – the parts that provide us with *reasons* for putting the presents under the tree. These parts of our realities include our plans and aspirations, moral principles, and ethical convictions; and along with their sources – that is, our friendships, loves, and relationships of various kinds – they exist and are sustained precisely *because* we believe in them.

Consider, for example, what many profess to be the ethical core of the American political experiment, contained in this passage from the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” However, when approached from the perspective that insists on truth as the independent standard of belief, one might invoke Jeremy Bentham's famous dismissal of ‘natural rights’ as ‘rhetorical nonsense – nonsense upon stilts’. We could say that to believe that people naturally possess some property that permits them to behave in certain ways while prohibiting others from interfering, is to indulge in magical thinking. Nor is that other ‘self-evident’ truth about all people being created equal any less benighted.

However, to view these claims through the prism of the truth-norm is to tragically distort their meaning. Rather, the purpose of insisting that we possess an inviolable nature that empowers us to live autonomously while demanding we be respected by others is to achieve a world where this is so. By spreading belief in the universal and equal distribution of certain rights we *generate* the norms that require people being treated accordingly. And as recognition of these norms grows, so too do expectations of conformity and the political will to found institutions whose function is to ensure it. But should sufficient numbers of people disregard these norms, members of such a society will have lost their natural rights. To have your rights violated routinely and with impunity is to have no rights at all. So the question isn't whether we *really* have natural rights, but whether we are the kind of society that is committed to honoring them. This is a question that turns on what, as a society, we value, and on what kind of people we take ourselves to be and who want to become. It is not a matter to be decided by trying to divine what is true.

What can be said about natural rights can be said about any of the normative features of our lives, and so, surely, about Santa Claus; To acknowledge their reality is not to indulge in frivolous make-believe, but rather to partake in the essential human practice of belief-making. So the reality of Santa is not to be found by taking a journey to the North Pole, but by venturing into the interconnected experience generated by the hearts and minds of believers. We have brought Santa to life not to deceive, but to delight: to make children happy and to fill their hearts with joy, which happens as they find meaning and value in inhabiting a shared reality that far exceeds their individual lives. Santa-believing parents want their children to feel loved and cherished by someone larger than themselves. These intentions aren't manipulative, they are nourishing, and most children are enriched by them. This, I believe, explains the lack of resentment and why we see children transition from believing in him as a mind-inde-

pendent being to happily sustaining this mind-dependent wonderland for other children, and eventually their own.

The Grinches, with their fixation on the offense of lying, have lost sight of an essential truth: besides believing with the aim of mirroring a mind-independent world, there is the more profound case of believing with the purpose of making a world fit for human minds to be in. To be sure, this category is not without its own moral risks; but to believe in Santa Claus is to enliven a world where kindness, generosity, and charity are expected. By intentionally creating expectations in others, we thereby assume the obligation of endeavoring to meet them. This is an important and underappreciated dimension to the ethics of belief, which philosophers usually discuss solely in terms of the requirement to believe what is true. But if we fail to make an effort to justify the hopes and dreams that we have licensed among Santa believers, then we're guilty of normative fraud. To put it bluntly, if we aren't willing to put our norm-making beliefs into action, then we're just deluding ourselves and others, and our noble-sounding words are without meaning.



IMAGE FROM SANTA CLAUS: THE MOVIE © TRI STAR PICTURES 1995

In the case of Santa, the risk of dashed hopes is greatest among the least fortunate. No child should believe that Santa has forgotten them or thinks that they're undeserving. Therefore, those of us who profess their faith in Santa should pledge to help him fulfill his mission however we can. Santa needs helpers, not deniers. We should be contributing to toy drives, volunteering to answer children's letters, and doing whatever else we can to help spread the joy of this special season to as many children as possible, especially those who have already tasted too much of life's miseries. And this surely includes encouraging our own children towards modesty in their petitions to Santa and their expectations of what he might bring. Wise counsel, then, is to be found in the words of The Kinks' classic Christmas song 'Father Christmas', which remind us to:

“Have yourself a merry merry Christmas
Have yourself a good time
But remember the kids who have nothin’
While you're drinkin' down your wine.”

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Joe Biehl is Founder & Executive Director of Gotham Philosophical Society, and Young Philosophers of New York.



Letters

When inspiration strikes, don't bottle it up.
Email me at rick.lewis@philosophynow.org
Keep them short and keep them coming!

Philosophy Fought the Law

DEAR EDITOR: If caught by the police, Luke Tarassenko (short story in Issue 134) couldn't claim he had done no wrong by knocking the escapist out with a heavy weight, to carry out his instruction to make it 'as hard as possible' to escape from the water tank. Hitting him over the head is not a reasonable compliance with his wishes; and the law requires that actions should be 'reasonable'. Clearly what Tarassenko did was not reasonable (and the court is the judge of what is reasonable). Neither could he claim he couldn't help himself, that he was a slave of determinism. The law *assumes* free will – that people can do or not do harmful things. If this were otherwise, then nobody would ever be guilty of anything. Tarassenko would probably be charged with grievous bodily harm, and if found guilty, would be imprisoned. Philosophy cannot win against the Law!

PETER WINDLE,
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

Remembering a Great Philosopher

DEAR EDITOR: Reminders of our mortality come in many forms. The latest for me appears in Issue 134 of *Philosophy Now* in the 'News' section, on Bryan Magee's death on 26 July this year, aged 89. His belief "in the importance of bringing philosophy to a wider audience" was reflected in his TV shows, including *The Great Philosophers*, and a book of the same title in 1987. This edited version was achieved with the cooperation of each of his interviewees so that, in Magee's words, "the book would have a life of its own independent of the television programmes" (p.11). I was part of that wider audience able to benefit from the fifteen dialogues. They were demanding, but engaging and informative, significantly because of Magee's ability to clarify difficult concepts and arguments. I drew on their substance in my professional work, and

in life more generally. Their relevance for me certainly persists and is of 'imperishable value', to use the words of John Maier's obituary in *Prospect* magazine.

Reviewing my video copy I found the appearances of Isaiah Berlin, Iris Murdoch and Noam Chomsky I half remembered occurred not in *The Great Philosophers* book or TV series, but in *Men of Ideas* (1978). Thankfully I found some of these earlier dialogues on the net.

COLIN BROOKES,
LEICESTERSHIRE

Failure to Relate

DEAR EDITOR: The article by Waqas Ahmed in Issue 134, 'The Mind of Leonardo da Vinci', described a 'systems thinker' as someone concerned with fluency across disciplines and relationships more than objects – relationships being more important than objects in any context. Yet don't even the closing five minutes of *Gone With The Wind* (or the last three years of Brexit) exemplify the highly problematic nature of many relationships?

A fluency in pursuing and knowing multiple perspectives can overcome difficulties, Ahmed implies. Hence, as well as an understanding of the curriculum, a college history tutor also needs a deep grasp of educational psychology (including memory, human individuality, diet and IQ), adolescent and parent relationships, multivariate analysis, ever-changing findings on social class, and, on behalf of one hundred grateful students, some way to pull the many strands of these concepts into a day's lesson plan!

Backgrounds in maths, biology, and cybernetics certainly helped Fritjof Capra and Ludwig von Bertalanffy assemble the framework called 'Systems Thinking' – a discipline now 'recognised in many fields'. However, no examples are given of modern systems research. Instead, the article presents opaque phrases likely to bemuse curious readers: for instance: 'everything is inextricably connected'; or that 'epistemological unity allows one to

be elevated to a higher perspective'.

Although the rip-roaring success of the 'hard' science conducted by Newton, Galileo, and Boyle cannot be repeated in more complex social settings, systems thinking needs to be a practical approach expressed in clear terms, not make incredible demands on practitioners. Leonardo da Vinci was apparently some kind of pathological lateral thinker; if the systems discipline is to be shared by lay people, guidelines for its application must not require them to possess extreme mindsets.

NEIL RICHARDSON, KIRKHEATON

Logic & Logos

DEAR EDITOR: In Issue 134 Raymond Tallis quotes the ingenious 'proof' of Daniel Kodaj that God does not exist. Kodaj argues from three premises:

1. Belief in God causes evil.
2. If God exists, then God wants us to believe in God.
3. If God exists, then God does not want us to do anything that causes evil.

The third premise is inconsistent with the second one when taken with the first premise. All three premises cannot be true. But certainly the first premise is only a partial truth. Religious belief also makes us do good – just as secular ideologies also make us do evil, as Tallis allows. Valid conclusions cannot be drawn from faulty, inconsistent premises.

The problem of evil is the main argument for atheism: if God is benign, omnipotent and all-knowing, how could he allow both human immorality and natural disasters, which cause his creatures so much misery? But God can't do what's logically impossible: he can't take simultaneous contradictory actions, or make circles with corners. He couldn't let us choose freely between good and evil without allowing us to choose evil. So perhaps in a world in which beings with a moral sense could evolve, natural disasters are inevitable. Or perhaps an evil god is in perpetual conflict with a good god, as Zoroastrians believe.

There is no way of proving or disproving the existence of God, so agnosticism is the only rational attitude. But beneficial beliefs are not necessarily based on evidence and reason; they can arise from culture and emotion.

ALLEN SHAW, LEEDS

I-DNA? I Do Not Agree

DEAR EDITOR: Personal identity is an intractable problem for philosophers, maybe impossible. Theories of psychology, body, and brain – or some composite of them – all have their pitfalls. Still, it does not follow that there is no such thing as identity, nor that we have nothing to work with.

Raymond Keogh's article 'DNA and the Identity Crisis' in Issue 133 attempts to ground the conversation about identity in science. Fair enough. But his veneration of DNA in producing what we call the person surely represents scientism of the worst kind. A better starting place for thinking of personal identity lies in perspective. Importantly, perspectives

themselves have no place in the material realm, since nothing in matter confers an appearance on itself. Thus, it is only by virtue of our *self-consciousness* that DNA can even enter the conversation about what we are.

Individuals confront their existence and identity as a problem to be solved. Yes, this involves studying our bodies, the things that anchor us in the world, but that's only part of the story. The self is a *perspective on*, not a *perspective in*, the world. With a scientific outlook, we stand to lose the things that make us human. Notions of freedom, accountability, intention, tensed time, colour, harmony, and quality, are dismissed as by-products of reproductive drives, or as mirages: the subject reduced to an object, perspectives effaced, and replaced with nothing.

True, the wealth of data provided by disciplines such as epigenetics cannot be ignored. Proclivities and traits are correlated with both our individual and our generic genetic make-up. However, the scientific approach to questions of identity

and personhood should be tempered by the limitations of the premises that underpin them. The humanities are already being encroached upon by the sciences, and we should protect them – lest we lovers of *Philosophy Now* face the prospect of *DNA Now* in the not so distant future.

THOMAS ARTHURSON
GEELONG, AUSTRALIA

DEAR EDITOR: In his enjoyable article in Issue 133, Raymond Keogh holds that the unchanging consistency of our DNA meets the criteria of personal identity, so that we are now free to transfer our ideas of identity from 'subjective notions', in favor of 'an objective concept based on science'. Keogh presents a strong case for those that support the 'sameness of body' idea of personal identity. But this criterion is only *one* of several within the debate. Personally, I question his tacit dismissal of John Locke's idea of identity being continuity of consciousness, which is arguably a much stronger case. Locke tells us that if a little finger is severed, and the consciousness travels along with the severed finger, then the finger is the person. Personal identity is preserved by and through the unity of consciousness within one continued life. Says Locke, "For, it being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself, personal identity depends on that only."

Apparently Keogh understands body and person as equivalent terms, shown in his example of the Alzheimer's sufferer who has lost most of her memory. He says that "she has the same genetic base as she had as an infant without self-awareness." It is a given that her DNA is the same, but how does this bear at all upon the question 'is she the same person?', if one holds that 'person' is defined by conscious continuity? A person – an autonomous, rational, moral agent – must be more than body alone.

JEFFREY LAIRD
KENTUCKY

DEAR EDITOR: Raymond Keogh claims that "Our DNA remains the same from the first instant of an individual's existence to his or her last breath." I challenge that. The science of genetics has entered a new age, and we now know that even if the sequence of nucleotides isn't altered, the data being transmitted has not remained the same, since external factors can play a role in attaching small strings of atoms to



CARTOON © WOLFGANG NIESIELSKI 2019

'I think, therefore I am' by René Descartes
Once made it to the top of the chart
Among philosophers, because it would link
Our mere existence, to the ability to think
No wonder they put it first on the list

As without thinking they wouldn't exist.
Wouldn't be able to make us miserable and glum;
Lucky for them they've got *Cogito ergo sum!*

WOLFGANG NIESIELSKI, USA

our DNA, thus turning on or off traits in ourselves and altering the DNA passed on to our descendants. So Lamarck's hypothesis has achieved a major comeback and has left Darwin in the shadow of a much more complex and, in my opinion, more believable theory of evolution. I believe this discovery not only upends our theory of life's progression from a singularity, but also lends credence to otherwise nearly unbelievable theories such as free will. Perhaps the dogmatic Darwinists of determinism have now been given a second chance to discard their fatalistic apathy.

NATE KAIN
TACOMA, WASHINGTON

Rossen's Universal Knowbots

DEAR EDITOR: Many thanks for the excellent Issue 133, and especially for the 'Einstein vs Logical Positivism' piece by Rossen Vassilev. It helped me pin down my disquiet about logical positivism and its scientific claims. I do have a small issue with the terminology. Vassilev uses the terms 'hypothesis' and 'theory' as if they are interchangeable, but they represent quite different states of knowledge. A *hypothesis* is an idea which works logically within the confines of current knowledge, but which has no experimental or direct physical evidence to support it: it is a proposal for a research programme. A *theory*, however, is a hypothesis which *has* been tested experimentally and not been proved wrong. The scientific method is the mechanism(s) by which hypotheses become theories (or remain hypotheses, or degenerate back to ideas). In this model, theories such as Newton's theory of celestial mechanics can degenerate to mere ideas if evidence builds against them – which is why we now tend to refer instead to Newton's 'work on' celestial mechanics. Lee Smolin, for some reason, talks about theory and 'true theory', which is misleading. As Popper pointed out, no theory is ever 'true'.

Where does all this leave the idea of the multiverse, as examined in the article? There is currently no experimental or direct physical evidence; so it cannot be a theory. It does work logically within the confines of quantum mechanics, so we could accept it as a hypothesis. There are, however, competing ideas explaining the problems the multiverse addresses, so it is a *disputed* hypothesis. We have a different word for competing, mutually-exclusive

hypotheses for which we seem unable to gather any scientific evidence: we call them *beliefs* – and, as Rossen points out, that puts the multiverse in a very different pocket of cognitive endeavour.

What I've said makes no difference to Rossen's carefully-argued case. But I've carried out my duties as a linguist. Or at least, that's what I believe.

MARTIN EDWARDES, LONDON

DEAR EDITOR: In 'Einstein vs Logical Positivism', Issue 133, Rossen Vassilev misrepresents the views of Lee Smolin about cosmological inflation. Vassilev states: "Smolin remarks that, 'The theory of inflation made predictions that seemed dubious'". But in *The Trouble with Physics* Smolin actually says: "The theory of inflation made predictions that seemed dubious, until the evidence began to swing toward them a decade ago. As of this writing, a few puzzles remain, but the bulk of the evidence supports the predictions of inflation." By failing to finish the quote, Vassilev implies that Smolin is sceptical about the scientific status of inflation theory. Perhaps there is a case for *Philosophy Now* employing someone to check citations.

Furthermore, I can find no evidence for Vassilev's claim that the theory of inflation requires eleven dimensions of spacetime. I think he may be confusing it with string theory.

JOHN WAKE

Thinking About Thinking About Thinking

DEAR EDITOR: In 'Science and Phenomenology', Issue 133, Kalina Moskaluk laments that experience is impossible to explore reliably from a first-person perspective because in the process of observing one's experience, one alters what is being observed. As she says, "paying close attention to phenomena in our experience makes us experience them in a different way than we would without that attentiveness." If this were so absolutely, one wonders how phenomenologists could gather any information about prereflective experience. But it ain't necessarily so.

It is quite true that some experiences are not amenable to direct observation. For instance, sometimes I attempt to pay close attention to the act of making a choice. While hiking, say, I stop at a fork in the path and try to watch myself make a decision to go left or right. But while I am

watching, no decision takes place. My progress is halted. Only after my attention wanders for a brief instant do I find myself striding along one fork or the other. The act of making a decision seems to be opaque to the reflective gaze.

But there *are* ways to gather information about prereflective experience. Perhaps the most obvious is to examine those phenomena for which reflection during one's experience of them makes no difference to the experience. For example, mathematical and logical objects appear to us without perspective. The number three has neither a front nor a back, it does not appear closer or farther away at one time rather than another, and it does not change when one looks at it from a different angle. There is, in fact, no way to view it perspectively, from left or right or above or below. Whether one is reflecting on one's perception of such an object during the process of perceiving it or not is irrelevant to this aspect of how it appears.

Another way is through memory. Husserl says that every instance of being conscious of something contains not only an impression of the object's 'givenness' in its current actuality, but a retention of the object as it was perceived a moment ago (as well as a *protention* of the same object as it is expected to be in the next moment). This retention is overlooked in the 'natural attitude' – our mode of being conscious in everyday life. That's why it's hard to do phenomenology. But we can notice it if we keep an eye out for it in our experience. One needs to cultivate a certain attitude of watchfulness – a sort of looking out for interesting experiences to catch them when they arise. Such an attitude is more akin to Buddhist mindfulness than to being obsessively self-conscious, and it need not distort our perception. What happens, for instance, when you space out – become distracted, or mentally remote – and forget what you were doing? Obviously, if you were conscious of spacing out, you would not space out. But shortly after you notice you've spaced out you can remember what was going on during the 'space-time'. In that way you can learn something about yourself and your experience of your world that is uniquely available to a first-person perspective.

Moskaluk advises us to "go out and play some phenomenology." It's not an impossible task, it just requires practice.

BILL MEACHAM, USA

The Philosothon Phenomenon

Mark Smith reports on how philosophy is getting competitive in schools.

If you could become invisible at will, would you still be good? Is mathematics a divine language? These are the sort of questions that young people might discuss in a Philosothon – a friendly philosophy competition for schools. Students sit in a circle called a Community of Inquiry and discuss age old philosophical questions. The students are then scored by a judge; usually an invited philosopher from a university. Philosothons were first tried with great success in Australian schools and, in 2014, launched in the UK at King's College, Taunton, Somerset, where I teach.

The Community of Inquiry teaching method was developed by Professor Matthew Lipman, the founder of the Philosophy for Children movement (P4C). Its process creates a collaborative and constructive learning experience gently guided by a facilitator. This mode of philosophical discussion allows the participants to simultaneously develop their social skills and cognitive abilities.

The scoring aspect of Philosothons is what makes the concept unique. The students score points for their school based on how well they interact with others within the circle. Grandstanding, dominating, and poor listening skills are marked down; facilitating, questioning assumptions, drawing others into the dialogue, and linking or developing ideas, score well.

A useful analogy for understanding what's going on is the Hindu story of the six blind men and the elephant. Each felt a different part of the elephant – leg, tusk, tail, trunk, body, ear – and

reached a different conclusion as to what it was: tree, sword, fly-whisk etc. The men left the town arguing. A little girl heard them, and said, "Each of you is right but you are all wrong... but I know what you're talking about!" The aim of a Philosothon is not to reach consensus, but for each participant to understand what the others are saying and why they're saying it.

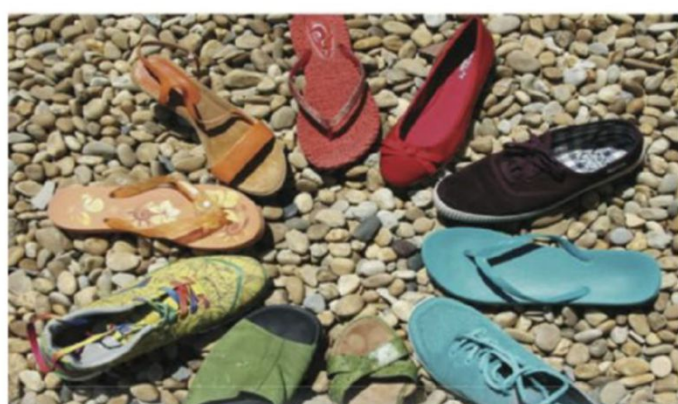
Cultivating the soft skills encouraged by a Philosothon is vital in an increasingly polarised world. Furthermore, a Philosothon provides a vehicle for improving important academic skills such as the evaluation of ideas, recognising the role of evidence in the development of an argument, and the ability to isolate key concepts in a piece of dense text. No wonder head teachers warm to the Philosothon when they encounter it.

We often hear adults describe young people today as superficial and obsessed with their phones, gaming, social media, and celebrity culture. However, in my twenty-five years of teaching, I have always been aware that young people are also fascinated with philosophy, ethics, and theology. Investigating the mysterious has a way of drawing out our best, perhaps most beautiful qualities. We are lifted, inspired and just a little more compassionate when wisdom is our teacher. Increasingly, studies are producing evidence of positive cognitive and social outcomes arising from the Community of Inquiry approach. In *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (2011), Stephan Millett and Alan Tapper give an extensive analysis of the benefits of the approach. Peggy Semingson, Pete Smith and Henry I. Anderson have also recently published an exciting study of the benefits of this approach when adapted to online learning, in *The Community of Inquiry Framework in Contemporary Education* (2018). I have seen how the interplay between the cognitive demands and the social setting of the Philosothon has a positive impact on the way pupils think and interact. As with a young child at play, learning is energised by an occasion that evokes joy, wonder, experience and risk. Might there not be opportunities for this kind of learning using the gaming technology which has exploded in popularity over the last couple of decades?

Over the next two years I will be working with Julie Arliss at Academy Conferences and Dr Andrew Pinsent, Research Director of the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford, to spread the message of the Philosothon to schools across the UK. I will be running classes for teachers who attend the Academy Conferences which will equip them to run their own Philosothons and organise the kind of regional events which we have found so popular at King's College. All going well, the two years will culminate in a UK national Philosothon.

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Father Mark Smith is Chaplain and Head of Philosophy of Religion & Ethics at King's College, Taunton. To express an interest, please contact Fr Mark at philosothon@academy-ltd.com



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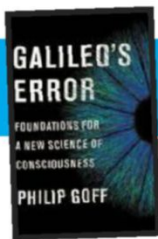
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Books



Galileo's Error by Philip Goff

PHILIP GOFF, CONSCIOUSNESS researcher at Durham University, is one of the most fearless of contemporary philosophers. His latest book *Galileo's Error: A New Science of Consciousness* is a defence of panpsychism – a philosophical position that until recently was dismissed as simply crazy.

As Goff defines it, panpsychism is the view that “consciousness is a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of reality,” such that *everything* has consciousness, even down to electrons and quarks. This does not mean that all the *arrangements* of fundamental particles – socks and clouds and pebbles – are conscious. Nor does it claim that this universally present consciousness is necessarily remotely similar to human consciousness, with thoughts and emotions and the like. “If electrons have experience” – which Goff believes – “it is of some unimaginably simple form.”

The case Goff presents for panpsychism is to a considerable extent based on the failure of alternatives – dualism and materialism – to explain consciousness. He devotes excellent chapters to demolishing these views.

According to dualism, there are immaterial minds and there are physical things. Because minds are not located or extended in space, we cannot see minds by peering into brains. This idea, famously mocked by Gilbert Ryle as the notion that we are ‘ghosts in machines’, has many problems. One of the most striking is that it cannot account for the central role the mind seems to play in our ability to do things. How could an immaterial entity influence the behaviour of a material object such as a brain? If a non-physical mind were intervening in the brain, there would be all kinds of things going on for which we would have no neuroscientific explanation. Such anomalous activity is not observed, so there is no such intervention, Goff argues.

Materialism fails because there is nothing in the brain as objectively (neuroscientifically) observed that is remotely like subjective experience. Here Goff’s critique mobilizes some of the well-known thought experiments in recent philosophy. Among them is Frank Jackson’s story of Mary the genius neuroscientist. For reasons that are

Our reviewers get metaphysical with your brain as **Raymond Tallis** questions an argument for panpsychism, **Nick Everitt** wonders why consciousness matters, and **Danny Forde** explores altered states.

not made clear, she has spent her entire life in a black-and-white room, where she has mysteriously acquired complete objective knowledge (whatever that may mean) of the science of colour. When she is liberated from the room into the outside world, she acquires something new: awareness of colours. This is often (incorrectly) described as additional ‘knowledge’, although it is in fact experience. The point however is upheld: experience is not reducible to or captured by objective knowledge. More specifically, what neuroscientists observe in the brain and nervous system does not get anywhere *near* subjective, qualitative experience. More generally, science-based materialism does not account for, or accommodate, consciousness – least of all the consciousness that is manifest in the ‘what it is like to be’ of a conscious subject.

The elusiveness of experience has persuaded some materialist philosophers to deny that experience is real. They argue that consciousness is an illusion. But this claim does not withstand a second’s thought; for in order to fall victim to the illusion of consciousness, one would have to be conscious of it.

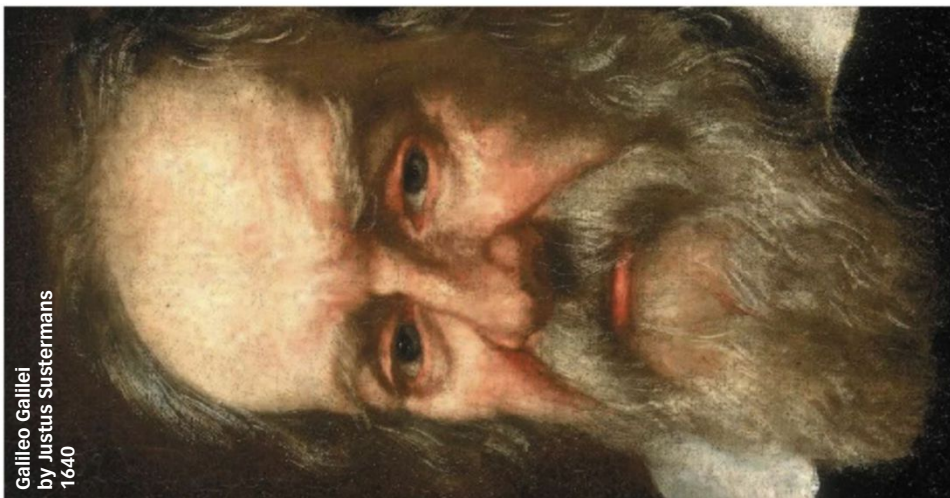
Panpsychists step into the explanatory gap left by the failure of both dualism and materialism to make sense of the relationship between the mind and the brain. They correctly recognize that this is not just a little local difficulty to be resolved as brain science advances. What is needed is a radical rethink of the place of consciousness in the order of things.

Goff draws on arguments put forward by the physicist Arthur Eddington, developing ideas advanced by Bertrand Russell, to the effect that the physical sciences tell us nothing

about the intrinsic nature of the ‘stuff’ that makes up the world. They describe only the manner in which bits of the stuff interact with each other. We know what they *do*, but not what they *are*. There is, however, a place where the veil of scientific appearance is torn; namely our own brains. We know from first hand experience that brains are conscious. Indeed, consciousness is the *only* fundamental feature of which we can be certain. If brains are representative of the stuff of the world, it is therefore reasonable to conclude that such stuff has consciousness as one of its fundamental features. (Indeed, Goff holds that the physical properties of particles – mass, charge, spin etc – are *themselves* forms of consciousness.)

Goff defends this extraordinary extrapolation from brains to the entire universe on the grounds of simplicity of explanation – grounds that, after all, drive science. It is more economical to propose that matter has one kind of intrinsic nature rather than two. But the suggestion that everything in the universe is like the brain raises an obvious question: what it is about the brain that makes it seem to be uniquely associated with subjective consciousness? Why do you and I have viewpoints underpinning integrated worlds, while socks and clouds and pebbles apparently do not?

One manifestation of this puzzle is the so-called ‘combination problem’: “How do you get from little conscious things... to big conscious things, like human brains?” Here we seem to have replaced one explanatory gap with another at least as wide. In the hope of making the combination problem a topic for ‘a new science of consciousness’, Goff trans-



Galileo Galilei
by Justus Sustermans
1640

lates it into the question of how a disunified brain, made of trillions of conscious particles, becomes a unified brain with a single consciousness. He hints that quantum entanglement might provide a model for such unification, but is not able to indicate what is or might be distinctive about the brain that it uniquely makes use of such entanglement. So long as this 'emergentist' model lacks details, it is only a promissory note. Worse problems arise out of the fact that observation – that is, observation by a conscious, macroscopic subject – is required to confer definite values on the quantum elements that go into the making of the brain, and which are supposed to help solve the combination problem.

The final chapter of *Galileo's Error*, 'Consciousness and the Meaning of Life', is laudably ambitious and wide-ranging, and I cannot do it justice here. However, some of its arguments sit ill with Goff's fundamental thesis. Goff argues that if we become panpsychists we might be motivated to treat the planet with more respect. Perhaps we would not be so eager to chop down the trees if we believed that they had sophisticated mental lives. This seems unlikely, given that awareness of their mental lives does not inhibit most of us from chopping down livestock. Goff cites research purportedly demonstrating that seedlings are capable of Pavlovian conditioning, and that trees 'communicate' with each other via fungi, and are even committed to egalitarianism. This is a spectacular over-interpretation of the scientific findings. But, more importantly, appealing to *objective, quantitative* science to demonstrate the presence of consciousness is at odds with the very thesis on which his argument hinges; namely that such science does *not* reveal the intrinsic nature of things. To think so is to fall victim to the very Galilean error that provides the title of his book; namely the error of privileging quantitative measurements over direct qualitative experience.

Goff sees panpsychism as a road to re-enchantment of a scientifically disenchanted world. Because it recognizes the urgency of this problem and even suggests a solution to it, this lucid, reader-friendly book is highly recommended. You may, like me, disagree with its conclusion, but the journey offered by *Galileo's Error* – enriched by many autobiographical asides – is exhilarating and deeply thought-provoking. I am glad to have read it; and so, too, will be any open-minded seeker after metaphysical truth.

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Raymond Tallis's latest book, *Seeing Ourselves: Reclaiming Humanity from God and Science* is published in November.

• *Galileo's Error*, Philip Goff, 2019, \$26.95 hb, 256 pages, ISBN: 9781524747961



Consciousness Matters by Oliver Leech

A CHESS PLAYER PONDERs her next move. She reviews the possible threats, the captures, the checks; she tries to foresee how her opponent will respond; she takes account of the fact that she is short of time, and she comes to a decision: she will castle. She raises her hand and moves the appropriate pieces. It is very plausible to say here that she makes the move she makes *because* of her prior deliberation. If so, some conscious events cause some physical events. She then goes on to win the game. But as she gets to her feet, she stumbles, falls, and bangs her head on the table. She at once feels a sharp pain in her head. Here, it is very plausible to say that her conscious state of pain occurs *because* she has banged her head. If so, some physical events cause some conscious events. These two causal claims seem no more than the barest common sense.

In *Consciousness Matters* (2017) Oliver Leech argues that this common sense view is wholly mistaken. His thesis – a version of what is called *occasionalism* – is that although there may be *correlations* between types of conscious states and types of physical states, including brain states, there is never a causal connection between them. We never do something because we have decided to do it; and we never think or feel anything because of input from the external world, or because of what is happening in our brains.

This surprising view originated in the writings of Islamic philosophers in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and was taken up by Christian thinkers in the seventeenth century. These earlier forms of occasional-

ism came with a theological twist: God was the cause of all changes in both the physical world and in our mental states. God maintained the correlations between conscious states and physical events, so that events of one type were reliable signs of events of the other type, even although there was no causal connection between them.

Leech's occasionalism comes without this theological backing. He defends it by arguing at length that conscious states are non-physical, and then invoking a theory of causation which says that a cause and its effect must be the same sort of thing, and that conscious and physical events are just too different to be thus linked.

The arguments he adduces in support of the idea that conscious states are non-physical form a very mixed bag, and some of them are less than compelling. For example, speaking of a person's consciousness of the taste of chillies, he says that "you cannot put it into a test tube, beside a Geiger counter, on scales to be weighed, alongside a ruler" (p.30) – from which he draws the conclusion that consciousness cannot be something physical. No doubt the claims I've just quoted are true; but they would be equally true of, say, a person's specific gravity, without that showing that specific gravity is a non-physical thing. Elsewhere, Leech shows a more sophisticated understanding of matter when he speaks of the claims of quantum mechanics. He believes that obscurities in the current concept of matter tell against the thesis that conscious states are material (materialism) rather than against the thesis that conscious states are non-material. Yet surely any obscurity in the concept of matter leaves both materialism and non-materialism over consciousness obscure.

More controversial than his claim that conscious states are non-physical is the second premise of his argument, that there is no causal connection between conscious states and any physical events. Leech's main reason for claiming this is that he thinks that because conscious events are non-physical they do not have a position in space; and if they don't have a position in space they cannot be either the cause or the effect of events that are spatially located. Whether one thinks this is adequate justification will depend on one's view of what causation is. But it does leave Leech with two problems, one general and one specific.

The general problem is that if physical and conscious states are not causally related, what explains the very high correlation between them? Although correlation is not proof of causality, if we find an extremely extensive and long-lasting correlation between two types of events, we usually seek to explain it in causal terms: either events of

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Trying to think

each type are linked as cause and effect, or possibly both of them are co-effects of a different common cause. Theological occasionalism solves this problem by claiming that the correlation is maintained by God. But knock God out of the picture as Leech does and we're left with an apparently inexplicable series of cosmic coincidences.

The more specific problem is that we think of our conscious states not just blandly as *causes* of some physical states of our brains, but as *explainers of our actions*. We can make sense of the chess player's move by saying that it was caused by her realisation that her rook was threatened. If conscious states never cause anything physical, such as human actions, then we're left without an explanation of why she moved the rook; indeed, we are left with no explanation of a huge swathe of human actions. This in turn threatens to undermine our conception of ourselves as agents: I agonise over what to do only because I think that my thoughts will make a difference to what I then do.

Most of the discussion in the book occurs in intellectual isolation, in the sense that there is very little reference to other authors who tackle the problems of consciousness. Popular treatments, such as Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*, or Steven Pinker's *How the Mind Works*, are not mentioned, and there is no reference to more academic discussions which seek to show how conscious states can be accommodated within a materialist perspective. Leech is well aware of the somewhat limited scope of his enquiry: he speaks of it as 'an opening gambit' (p.vii), and forestalls criticism by acknowledging that it provides "no more than a partial and flawed understanding".

On a kindly reading, *Consciousness Matters* is an easy-to-read, nicely paced, clear introduction to philosophical ideas about consciousness. It is free from distracting jargon, provides a lot of accessible examples and analogies, and has the very great merit of taking seriously lines of argument even when they lead to highly counterintuitive conclusions. On a ruthless reading, the book is a simple rehash of long-refuted ideas, showing no awareness of well-known lines of attack on its claims, and unconnected to current discussions. Perhaps a judicious reviewer would find elements of truth in both these characterisations, although a more charitable one would plump for the kinder.

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Nick Everitt was Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of East Anglia. He is the author of *The Non-Existence of God* (Routledge).

• *Consciousness Matters*, Oliver Leech, 2017, \$7.50 pb, 154 pages, ISBN: 978-1911175827

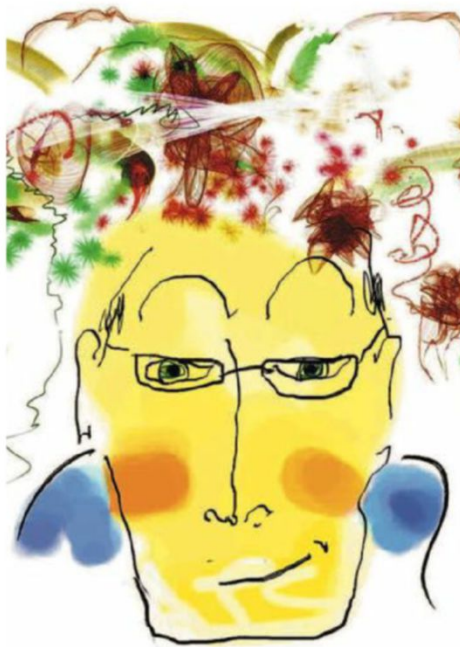


Am I Dreaming? by James Kingsland

QUITE OFTEN I JUDGE A BOOK on how long a list it produces.

This list is comprised of things I found in it which merit further exploration. Having turned the final page of James Kingsland's *Am I Dreaming?*, the list it generated not only includes academic papers and books, but also music selections curated for psychedelic experiences, and instructions for self-hypnosis and lucid dreaming. (I tried the lucid dreaming technique, but as of yet to no avail. I'll persevere nonetheless, as there does seem to be something to it.) Aside from this list, the book offers an exposition of the intersection of altered states, neuroscience, and philosophy.

Kingsland's previous book, *Siddhartha's Brain* (2016) looked at the intersection between the insights of Buddhism and neuroscience, showing the benefits of meditation and mindfulness. In the new book he expands the scope of his investigation to include psychedelics, hypnosis, lucid dreaming, online gaming, and theories of perception, in order to show how these altered states benefit the brain, and of course its occupant, by resetting ingrained patterns of thought and behaviour. Early on we are warned that "one of the take home messages of this book is that you can't reap the restorative benefits of sleep, or any other altered state of consciousness, without temporarily disconnecting from the reality checks that your senses and rational mind normally provide" (p.25). Having duly noted, I buckled up for the ride.



Imagining

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Kingsland does a wonderful job of succinctly conveying complex theories such as the increasingly-accepted prediction error processing theory of perception. In short, rather than accurately representing the world solely due to the information immediately gleaned from senses, the brain is constantly drawing on past experiences to predict what will happen next in the world, so trying to stay one step ahead by acting as an 'inference engine'. In this respect the neuroscientist Karl Friston has my favourite quote in the book: "Perception is just hallucination that's constrained by sensory evidence" (p.136).

The chapter on dreaming and sleep opens with frightening tales of radio competitions called 'wakeathons' that used to happen in the 1950s, and the horrifying fact that the world record for staying awake is 264 hours. *Guinness World Records* no longer lists this record as its committee recognises that trying to break this record is too dangerous and can provoke psychosis.

Sleep is portrayed as the body's way of wielding Occam's Razor "to prune the profuse neuronal connections that have sprouted during the day's learning experiences" (p.41) – so making the brain's processing models simpler and more efficient. Kingsland has a fascinating discussion of transcranial alternating current stimulation (tACS) devices, and how they can be used as an aide to lucid dreaming, with the potential to treat Post Traumatic Stress, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and even schizophrenia. The chapter closes with detailed instructions on how to dream lucidly. These instructions are certainly cheaper than the tACS device, which according to a cursory Google, costs just shy of five thousand dollars.

The following chapter focuses on video games and virtual reality. Here we learn about the brain's temporoparietal junction (TPJ) region, and its dual role in creating our sense of embodied selfhood, and also generating our understanding of (the) minds of others. So my TPJ is the apparent source of my sense of me as an agent within a body and also my sense of other minds. One study where gamers had fMRI scans whilst playing, showed that activity in their TPJ was suppressed: "it was as if they had transferred a crucial part of their selfhood into that world, leaving their real bodies behind" (p.75). Kingsland fleshes out the potential therapeutic applications of these findings, for example using the gaming platform Playmancer, which has been developed to be used in conjunction with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to treat conditions such as gambling disorder or bulimia nervosa.

From gaming we move on to hypnosis. The examples Kingsland gives range from a



The Key
Paul Gregory
2019

Danish study into Christians listening to prayers; the power of expectation to influence behaviour, studied using a phoney adrenaline injection; Tibetan *gtummo* meditation and a device known as the God Helmet. These seemingly disparate examples are masterfully sewn together for a coherent insight into the power of expectation, context, and belief of subjects for their thoughts and behaviours. Our attention is directed to the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (the top front of your brain) and its role in executive control, or in other words, making decisions. It is this area which ‘shamans, priests, and hypnotists hijack’, apparently.

The following three chapters focus on psychedelic drugs, their mechanism of action, and their therapeutic benefits. Firstly there’s a thorough discussion of the brain’s Default Mode Network and its function in creating our narrative or autobiographical sense of self. Psychedelics essentially take this network offline, thereby causing the sense of egolessness and oneness or boundlessness one experiences on high doses. Kingsland does a marvellous job of describing the Entropic Brain Hypothesis put forth by Robin Carhart-Harris, perhaps this generation’s leading psychedelics researcher, and head of the Psychedelic Research Centre at Imperial College in London [head of the heads, then, Ed]: “A reboot may be just what’s needed to shake out the rigid patterns of thought and behaviour that characterises many mental illnesses” Kingsland concludes (p.130).

This indeed is the whole thrust of the book – learning how we can use altered brain-and-

mind states to our benefit. For example, in the following chapter we meet a chap named Benjamin Mudge who is carrying out ‘autoethnographic research’ by using ayahuasca, a potent psychedelic brew traditionally used by South American shamans, to treat his bipolar disorder. It seems to be having quite a positive impact. Similarly, psilocybin, the active ingredient in magic mushrooms, has been showing some very promising results in trials carried out at Imperial College for treating depression. There’s a riveting examination of the effects of music on the psychedelic experience through the work of Mendel Kalen, also based at the Imperial College. This synergy between music and psychedelics is also a key component of studies going on at Johns Hopkins University. (By the way, some of the tracks recommended to accompany psychedelic experiences are ‘In a Silent Way’ by Miles Davis, ‘Echoes’ by Pink Floyd, ‘Adagio for Strings’ by Samuel Barber, and ‘Symphony no.3’ by Górecki.) The chapters on psychedelics close with an analysis of the neural correlates of their existentially affirming effects. In particular, the brain’s ‘salience network’, which underlies our sense of meaningfulness, is short-circuited by the psychedelic experience. This is why Aldous Huxley, whilst under the effect of mescaline, could see such meaning in normally mundane things such as the weave of his trousers.

Analysis of meditation carries on from where the examination of psychedelics lets off. Albert Hoffman, the Swiss chemist who first synthesised LSD, was convinced that

psychedelics and meditation have complementary effects. Modern neuroscience is backing this idea up. Both psychedelics and meditation effect the Default Mode Network. So rather than being two disparate methods for achieving the same end, they can be used in a complimentary fashion, as aides to one another. Kingsland goes into great detail on the eight layers of absorption, or jhanas, of Theravada Buddhism, and cites several studies into the benefits of absorption. These studies suggest that “we should learn how to tune in to our bodies, perhaps through mindfulness and meditation, with or without the help of psychedelics – and turn off our smartphones” (p.235).

Socrates argued that those who practice philosophy in the proper manner are practicing for death and dying. If this is the case, then perhaps psychedelics can play a significant part in the philosophical life. Studies in which patients with a terminal diagnosis have been administered a high dose of psilocybin yielded interesting results: “Patients who took the drug became less afraid of dying and enjoyed an increased quality of life” (p.241). Kingsland draws similarities between the liminal states of consciousness produced by psychedelics and Tibetan *Bardo* yoga, according to which “non-REM sleep is a training ground for death”. Historically, connections have been made between Tibetan Buddhism and the psychedelic experience: in the mid-Sixties, Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner published a ‘trippers’ guide’ based on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. However, not all Buddhists are happy with this connection. The fifth precept of Buddhism forbids intoxication. Kingsland quotes a monk who told him that the Buddha’s teachings, or *Dharma*, “is a precious pearl that should not, and cannot, be handed over to another person, let alone to a drug that can only absorb you into perceptions and feelings” (p.257). That said, Kingsland makes the claim that a truly life-altering experience, an actual challenge to one’s cognitive model of selfhood, requires more than a philosophical argument. It requires a shock of some kind. This shock can come in many forms and through many techniques, be they chemical, meditative, or technological. The benefits of taking a trek through ‘the antipodes of the mind’, to borrow Huxley’s phrase, are both manifold and empirically verifiable.

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Danny Forde is currently pursuing a PhD at University College Cork on the phenomenology of psychedelic experience.

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Alex Hooke meets Nietzsche and Sartre... in *The Twilight Zone*.



"I sought great human beings. I never found anything but the apes of their ideal."

Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

"Everything began to spin and I found myself sitting on the ground: I laughed so hard I cried."

Sartre, 'The Wall'

I walk up to the bar and I order a beer. The bartender recognizes me and brings the usual. Then he quietly says, "We have some unusual guests. Slowly turn to look at the table behind you." I'm impatient and turn my head immediately. One of them has a huge mustache and dark, focused eyes. The other is smoking a pipe and has a lazy eye that seems to be looking at me rather than his drinking partner. The pub is relatively quiet this afternoon, so I can also overhear snippets of their exchange. It's highlighted with terms like 'nothingness', 'eternal recurrence', 'bad faith', 'useless passion', and '*übermensch*'.

I can't believe my eyes or ears. It *looks* like them. It *sounds* like what they might talk about. But they're supposed to be dead. I ask the bartender what's going on. Suddenly, the bartender lights up a cigarette, leans over the bar, and quietly mutters, "You just walked into a bar whose happy hour is now called... *the Twilight Zone*."

The Existential Zone

The original *Twilight Zone* was an American television show that lasted only five years. Despite its brief span, from 1959 to 1964, many critics rank it among the ten most important and influential TV shows of all time.

A creation of Rod Serling, *The Twilight Zone* was indeed both revolutionary and prophetic. Television audiences entertained by bland game shows and suburban sitcoms had never seen anything like it. In their living rooms they were introduced to erotic robots, aliens feasting on humans, lost souls in another time or space, machines dictating the actions of people, obsolete individuals sentenced to death, insidious tricks devised by the grim reaper or by Satan. The audiences were dared to think and let their imaginations wonder.

Controversies introduced by *The Twilight Zone* with wit and surprise remain with us. Writers still use the phrase 'twilight zone' when alluding to odd machinations of institutions or political forums or unexplained happenings. Its legacy has lasted generations and continually inspires further creative work, such as *Black Mirror*. And although Lester Hunt, Noel Coward, and Mark Dawidziak have presented illuminating philosophical approaches to Rod

Serling's visions, they neglected some core existentialist themes illuminated – as well as mocked – in *Twilight Zone* episodes. I want to make up for that deficit a little here.

Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre, two stalwarts of the existentialist tradition, often developed their ideas without recourse to other mainstream philosophers, instead addressing the insights of novelists, poets, artists and musicians. Sartre clearly believed that Flaubert and de Sade have as much to teach us about human ideals and depravity as do Hegel or Plato. For Nietzsche, the early Christian Fathers, classic playwrights, or contemporary Darwinists, provoked important questions about human destiny and the improvement or corruption of a species. Perhaps we can deploy Serling's speculations, and imagine Nietzsche and Sartre in a 2020 pub addressing the twists and turns of *The Twilight Zone*.

The Idea of the *Übermensch* is a Humanism

Nietzsche is often associated with calling for a 'superman' or 'overman' – each an awkward translation of his term '*Übermensch*'. As the term appears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885), it evokes the sense that humanity is a work in progress – or regress – and great people are needed to overcome our present failings. *Zarathustra*'s translator Walter Kaufmann himself emphasized that 'über' is less an adjective than a sense of 'overcoming': the idea is of humans creating new ways of being, individually and socially. In his widely reprinted public lecture, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' (1946), Sartre focuses on freedom. Humans choose their projects and purposes rather than have them defined for them by God, genetics, or social circumstances. Humans are, in Sartre's words, "self-surpassing... man is the heart and center of his [own] transcendence."

The bartender inexplicably switches the big screen to a *Twilight Zone* episode, 'Obsolete Man'. The penetrating eyes of both Nietzsche and Sartre are captivated by Meredith Burgess, the wonderful actor who plays Mr Wordsworth, the obsolete man. Why is he obsolete? He reads everything he



Hell is other people.
Even if they're Martians.



can get his hands on, be it novels, magazines, or the Bible. In this character we see a joyful freedom and a liberated soul. But in the story it is precisely these qualities that render him obsolete and destined for immediate execution. His freedom is antithetical to the State, which plans on a more conforming and controlled form of man. You can imagine Nietzsche and Sartre watching this and saying to one another: in this episode, you and I would undoubtedly be rendered obsolete. We would have had our heads chopped off, as we would have been condemned by the State. This is the opposite of freedom, transcendence, overcoming. (Thought experiment: Would Nietzsche and Sartre find humor in this absurd possibility, or bemoan it?)

It must be a *Twilight Zone* binge at the pub, as the episode 'To Serve Man' appears on the screen immediately afterwards. The patrons suddenly see aliens descend upon the Earth. The radio stations put listeners at high alert, the military readies its forces, and everyone is fearful. The alien Kanamits resemble human beings, except they are nine feet tall, have large heads, and communicate telepathically. One Kanamit peacefully approaches the earthlings to assure them he means no harm. The aliens are here to provide peace, food, and an end to human conflict. All they ask of earthlings is trust. Sure enough, humans soon have all the pleasures of life and the comforts of leisure. The Kanamits casually invite people to visit their planet for an even better life. Scores of humans eagerly line up to depart, while two language experts arduously translate a Kanamit book. One uncovers the book's title, 'To Serve Man'; but soon learns that the book (spoiler alert!) is a *cook book*. The humans are being fattened up so they can embellish the diets of their alien hosts. This is one interpretation of the idea of overcoming human beings.

Looking Like Hell

Wrapping up his best-known play, *No Exit* (1944), Sartre concludes with one of the most memorable lines in existentialist literature. The play involves three characters who are dead but unsure where they are, other than being in the same room. They see no angels and hear no harps, nor do they feel the heat of raging fires or smell brimstone. Eventually, however, the gaze or look

they cast upon one another becomes unbearable. The alternate to heaven is not Satan's nefarious den, Sartre concludes: "Hell is other people."

Nietzsche, who is quite familiar with Protestant ministers' and the Church Fathers' treatises on heaven and hell – his father had been a Lutheran pastor – reminds Sartre that the early Christian writer Tertullian's essay *On Spectacles* highlights how early Christians were mocked for their



heresy against the pagan gods, but says Christians would get the last laugh. As Nietzsche explains it in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Tertullian envisions a heaven where Christians delight in watching the persecuting pagans now suffering eternal damnation (Tertullian was possibly making a satirical point about those who get pleasure out of watching others suffer).

Numerous episodes of *The Twilight Zone* reflect the theme of hell in the gaze of others. Considered to be among the best episodes, 'In The Eye of the Beholder' eerily portrays shadows and voices in a hospital room. The patient's face is wrapped in bandages while we hear her frightful anticipation of the results of the surgery. She was born with a disfigured face, and after ten unsuccessful operations, she has one more chance before she is exiled to an island of misfits. The doctors and nurses offer solace and hope. After twenty minutes into a thirty minute show, the bandages are unwrapped and viewers finally see a face – the patient

looking into a mirror. She shrieks. The surgery is again unsuccessful! Wait, we say to ourselves, the patient is undeniably beautiful. Then we catch a glimpse of the nurses and doctors. They all have distorted, pig-like faces (my apologies to pigs). In this remarkable twist, the patient's hell has been the look

of others whose standard of physical appeal is drastically different from ours.

The episode 'People Are Alike All Over' relies on the notion that humanity is universally recognizable. An astronaut lands on Mars and finds natives who look just like him, and us. But this visitor, Serling's voice notes, has a "very tiny undeveloped brain; comes from a primitive planet named Earth." The Martians calm his fears and welcome him, inviting him to a suburban-like house that resembles his own on Earth. The earthling is charmed by the natives' thoughtful attention. Then he tries to walk out, but finds there are bars surrounding his house. It is a cage. He looks out and the natives are staring at him, as if he's an exotic creature belonging in a zoo.

A side note. When presenting these episodes to my students, I was surprised they were intrigued by how prophetic Rod Serling was. Since much of their lives are on social media, they claim that the looks of others can be just as condemning and perverse as those in *No Exit* or 'Eye of the Beholder'.

Time For Eternal Recurrence

Many philosophers have given thought to the nature(s) of time and space. Sartre addresses time as an aspect of human finitude, and sees consciousness as something that reaches into the past while anticipating an uncertain future. Nietzsche's 'eternal recurrence' was a brief but provocative thought experiment. He asks, what if a demon says you might have to live this life – each pain and joy, each hope and despair – innumerable more times, forever and ever? (*The Gay Science*, 341: 'The Greatest Weight')

Weighing up the human condition in 'To Serve Man'



The episode 'Escape Clause' indulges this sort of existential test. A hypochondriac and self-absorbed man named Bedeker makes a deal with the Devil. He exchanges his soul for the promise that he will never die. Bedeker does all sorts of crazy things – jumps in front of a train, drinks poison, and even murders his wife. Soon bored of the continual recurrence of things, Bedeker hopes that his next crime warrants an execution. Instead, he gets life imprisonment. This sense of eternal recurrence in jail horrifies him, and he seeks the grace of the Devil to help him to escape their original agreement (no spoiler alert here).

'Judgment Night' features a German passenger on a British ship during WW II. Carl Lanser, however, has no memory of who he is or why he is on the ship. Nevertheless, he warns the other passengers and the captain that in the early morning they will be attacked by an enemy submarine. No one heeds his warnings. Indeed, they believe he is a kook. Lanser then takes his binoculars and spots a German U-boat, catching sight of its commander – Kapitän Carl Lanser, who is about to give the order to sink this ship full of

innocent civilians. Lanser is both innocent passenger and U-boat commander; and the curse resulting from his decision is that "this man will ride the ghost of that ship every night for eternity."

One of the most endearing episodes is 'Time Enough At Last'. Henry Bemis is a bookish individual. He will read anything and everything, from plays and history to fiction and poetry, even the ingredients listed on food containers. He has little joy among other people – the bank manager keeps threatening him, his wife mocks him

while destroying his reading materials – so he seeks momentary refuge by hiding in the bank's vault to read without being disturbed. Suddenly, a huge shake occurs. When Bemis leaves the bank he sees that a nuclear exchange has eliminated humanity. He frets over endless loneliness and a solitary death; then he chances upon a destroyed library with thousands of books lying about. He experiences a childlike and joyous discovery that illuminates Nietzsche's idea of *the love of fate*: Bemis is prepared to live this day like every other day, as he arranges his reading for the next year or more. Alas, not for long. He breaks his reading glasses. As the episode closes, we realize eternal recurrence also evokes another fundamental theme in existentialist thought: life is absurd, and not fair.

The Laughable Animal

"How much is still possible! So learn to laugh beyond yourselves," Nietzsche proclaims in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Introducing his anthology *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (1987), John Morreall proposes three general theories for why we

laugh. They are *superiority*, *relief*, and *incongruity*. First, we laugh at those who are beneath us or who have had a moral collapse – as seen in jokes about people being stupid, or jokes about prominent persons or groups experiencing sudden misfortune due to their own vices. Or we laugh out of nervousness and excess energy, due to the transgression of social taboos. Or third, we are amused by an event or deed which clashes with our practical expectations or conventional outlooks and habits. *The Twilight Zone* seems closest to this third category (though it flirts with the other two categories as well). The stories play on our familiar beliefs and the rational approaches we take to surprising situations and ordinary routines. Not just invasions by Kanamits or nuclear bombs wiping out humanity, but walking to work, playing a saxophone, or shooting a game of pool, can be the quotidian occasion for a *Twilight Zone* story. Yet this account still overlooks a key existentialist concern: what is it that confronts our experiences and expectations to provoke such laughter?

It is ourselves. Rod Serling insisted that his renowned TV show was not about science fiction or futuristic scenes: it was, in his words, "about human beings involved in extraordinary circumstance, in strange problems of their own or fate's making." These problems of their own making can be seen in the range of human artifacts, from masks and computers to talking toys and slot machines, that befuddle and torment their creators. The role of fate is found in unexpected moments that seem to appear from nowhere. We laugh at them because we are the laughable animal. Watching a prisoner fall in love with a female-like robot, a computer becoming jealous of its operator's affection for an office mate, a righteous husband succumbing to the forces of a one-armed bandit, sparks laughter not at the non-human elements or at those who supposedly are inferior to us: we laugh – or despair – because watching *The Twilight Zone* is like staring into a mirror.

As I thank the bartender and depart, I take one more glimpse at the unusual visitors and wonder about their existential response to these *Twilight Zone* tales: despair, or laughter, or both?

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Alexander E. Hooke teaches philosophy at Stevenson University, USA. He is author of *Philosophy Sketches: 700 Words at a Time* (Apprentice House), Alphonso Lingis and Existential Genealogy (Zero Books) and co-editor of *The Twilight Zone and Philosophy* (Open Court).



Would Machiavelli Vote For Donald Trump?

Peter Adamson reads a modern Renaissance political manual.

One of the many puzzles of our current political moment is the enthusiastic support that bad men receive from good people. Donald Trump is nobody's idea of a good person, except for Donald Trump's. His personality is made up largely from four of the seven deadly sins of Christian tradition: greed, wrath, pride, and lust. Yet many conservative Christians in America count themselves among his staunchest adherents. They would probably not leave him alone with their daughters, but they don't mind putting the country in his hands.

What's going on here? Some hypocrisy, no doubt; but perhaps also a genuine insight – namely that the traits we normally admire and look for in our friends and colleagues may not be paramount, and could even be counterproductive, in our political leaders.

The history of philosophy provides scant support for this view. Beginning with Plato – who thought that the state should be overseen by philosophers – it was a commonplace in Europe and beyond to insist that the perfect ruler is perfectly virtuous. This was a message repeated across the centuries in different cultures in so-called 'mirrors for princes' – texts of advice that were composed by such diverse authors as the Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk; a Byzantine churchman named Agapetus; Thomas Aquinas's student Giles of Rome; and the medieval proto-feminist Christine de Pizan. Such texts typically explain how the prince will benefit personally, and see his state and its people flourish, if he adheres to a rigorous ethical code, embodying justice, generosity, and mercy.

Yet the most famous contribution to this genre, Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532), broke with that moralizing tradition. For Machiavelli a good ruler must often act like a bad person, and one of Machiavelli's central claims is that conventionally good character traits can indeed be counterproductive for political leaders. The prince must 'learn how not to be

good', making effective use of deception, cruelty, and self-interest in order to maintain his position. Famously, Machiavelli says that it is best for the ruler to be both loved and feared, but if he has to choose, it is better to be feared than loved. He adduces historical examples to show how excessive lenience or generosity brings rulers to grief, and how useful selective barbarity can be. There was, for instance, the cunning duke who appointed a minister to impose harsh policies, and once this had the intended effect, had the minister cut in half and put on public display to defuse the people's resentment. When it comes to private conduct, too, Machiavelli departs from classical authors such as Cicero, who insisted that rulers must not indulge in sins of the flesh. Machiavelli is not really troubled about that, so long as the prince's political ambitions are not undermined.

Occasionally Machiavelli can seem to be analyzing Trump's political success five hundred years before the fact, as when he writes that "one who deceives will always find those who allow themselves to be deceived", or advises the prince to act quickly and unpredictably, so as to "keep the subjects' minds uncertain, and astonished, and occupied in watching the result." Apart from the good diction, one could imagine Trump himself saying that "it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, if you wish to master her, to conquer her by force."

But in other respects Machiavelli would be less impressed by the current President of the USA. His behaviour might be called by us 'Machiavellian'; but what we understand by the term is, as it turns out, an oversimplification of Machiavelli's teaching. Machiavelli does not abandon the notion of 'virtue', but instead reframes it, understanding it not as adherence to conventional morality but rather as the ability to react to the tides of good and bad fortune so as to achieve glory, since he believed that the purpose of effective political leadership

is the winning of glory for both the leader and the state. For the effective prince, 'necessary evils' are just that – necessary – and never to be chosen casually, or for their own sake. The prince is forced to do bad things because he is surrounded by bad people, who are ready to pounce on any weakness or concession. Wicked deeds are done well when done quickly and effectively, with the prince returning to more moral conduct as soon as possible. Thus Machiavelli writes about doing all one's cruelties at once to get them out of the way. One reason for this is that the prince must never acquire a *reputation* for immorality, which would be in flagrant contradiction to the goal of achieving glory. He should instead act with 'grandeur, spirit, gravity, and fortitude'. He should on no account surround himself with flatterers. It is also a sign of terrible leadership if the prince appoints advisors and then has to get rid of them, since this shows that he was being unwise in his initial choice.

Trump is starting to sound not so Machiavellian at this point, an impression confirmed when we consider the emphasis Machiavelli places on civic unity. One of the few goals that justifies cruelty in a ruler is the establishment of unity among the people. Machiavelli cites the great Carthaginian leader Hannibal as a paradigm case: his harsh treatment of his own soldiers, combined with his other virtues, ensured that his army remained loyal and committed to their cause. The wise prince sees to it that his whole people are behind him, or at least not against him. If it is better to be feared than loved, worst of all is to be hated. So Machiavelli's prince would never foment or exploit division among his people, since this will inevitably breed enemies who will plot to bring him down. Which, I have to say, sounds familiar.

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Peter Adamson is the author of *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps*, Vols 1 – 4, available from OUP. They're based on his popular *History of Philosophy* podcast.

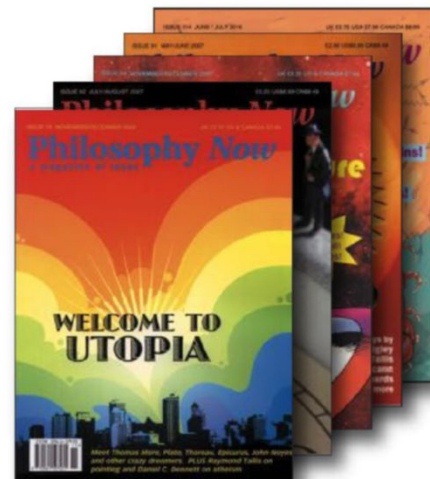
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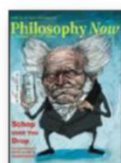
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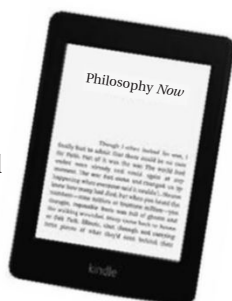
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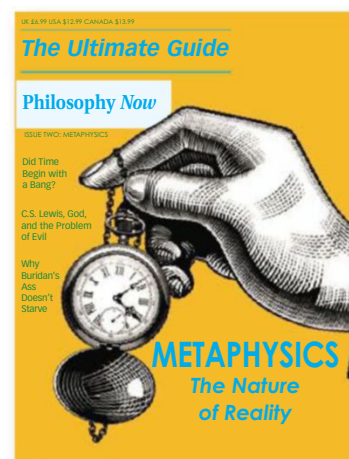


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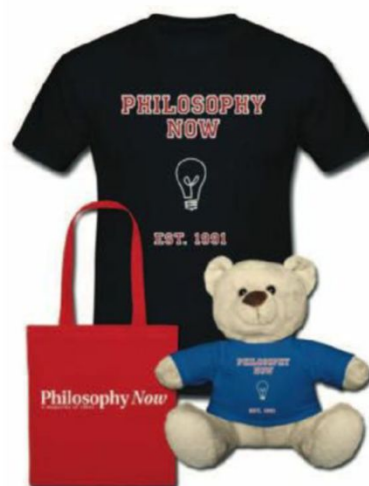
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Michael Ruse

is a well known philosopher of biology. He has written extensively on the relationship between science and religion. His latest book is *A Meaning to Life* (OUP).

Seth Hart asked him about it.

Hello Professor Ruse. My first question is about the title of your new book. I notice that you chose the indefinite A for your title rather than The. Why is it called A Meaning to Life rather than The Meaning of Life?

It was my editor at Oxford University Press, Peter Ohlin, who pushed that one: he said, “Mike, you’re not writing a scholarly monograph.” For a scholarly monograph the first two chapters would be devoted to what other people have said on the topic, a little bit like what you’d do in a PhD dissertation. Peter continued, “You worked on Darwin and religion and science for over sixty years. What I’d like is your take on it. Where do you come out on it?” With *a* meaning, you’re not pretending to speak for everyone, you’re just speaking for yourself. With the sort of ego I have, I replied, “You know, that suits me just fine! As I get to this stage of life [Ruse was born in 1940, Ed], I’m getting sick of talking about other people!” There’s a little more to it than that, but that’s basically why it’s *a* meaning rather than *the* meaning.

That leads naturally into my next question. You ultimately say you cannot find an objective meaning to life, but you say there is a subjective meaning, which is grounded in our nature as evolved beings. You give three ways to find this subjective meaning: 1) Family; 2) Morality; and 3) Promoting the life of the mind. How did you get there?

You have to start at the beginning, in my childhood as a Quaker, which I talk about in the book. We were very firmly Christian, but Quakers don’t have ministers or steeplehouses. It’s not that you make it up yourself; but you do have to think it through yourself. I went to a Quaker boarding school as well, and this was tremendously influential on me – although I do joke that having had one headmaster in this life, I’m damned if I want another in the next! The Quaker attitude was always interested in mysticism. They don’t need to be very good at talking about what God is (it’s an *apophatic* theology – which means you define God by what he is not). Quakers are very good at leading you through things; but in the end, it’s your decision.

So at the age of twenty, when my faith started to fade, no one said, “You’re condemned to eternal damnation if you disbelieve.” They just said, “A lot of people do feel that way, and some come back. That’s your decision.” That’s something that has stayed with me.

It sounds as if philosophy drove me to nonbelief. I don’t think that’s true; the two were sufficiently independent. But there was a link. As someone who had, during his childhood, spent time not just believing in things but discussing *why* one believes in things – in the Second World War the Quakers were pacifists so there was a lot of discussion about this – philosophy was natural to me because I had been doing it all my life! After reading Descartes’s *Meditations* I thought, “Grown ups actually worry about these things! I’ve worried about these things all my life!” So I think my Quaker background prepared me for philosophy; but I’d deny that my background made me a philosopher, or that philosophy made me lose my faith.

I’ve always been religious, in the sense of religion in the ‘entire absence of theology’, as Thomas Henry Huxley put it. I’ve always felt drawn to that. Most agnostics mean they don’t really care about it, that religion is not a part of their life. But it has been part of my life, and in a liberating way. I was working on Darwin when the Creationist controversy came back into fashion, and now I’ve been working on him for the past forty years. In my third chapter I look into whether science can be used as a substitute for religion. My good friends Ed Wilson and Robert Richards are really into that sort of thing. I was different. I always took courses on existentialism. I remember as a schoolboy coming home from a movie that I really enjoyed immensely. Turns out it was based on one of Sartre’s novels! It wasn’t about waking up one day and saying, “I’m an existentialist.”

As a nonbeliever – not an atheist; I’m not an atheist – it’s led me to think a lot about what sort of meaning one can have in life if you don’t think it’s about joining the Big Fellow in the Sky. I didn’t suddenly think it all up when I started to write this book: it was about putting



together different strands from over the years. I'm very close to many Christians and Buddhists, and I find their belief attractive, but not in the sense that would compel me. It's not so much whether God exists but whether his existence is important, which is a paradoxical position. I wrote a book about five years ago on Darwinism and literature [*Darwinism as Religion*, 2016], and as I worked through the post-Darwinian era of Victorian England, I found that the preeminent question then was not whether God existed but whether God was relevant. That's what you find in Thomas Hardy, Emily Dickinson, and George Eliot. This study allowed me to focus on this question of the relevance of belief in God.

Now most Christians – especially in the American South, which is where I live – would consider this question paradoxical to the point of being heretical. It just doesn't make sense. How could you say it doesn't matter whether God exists? But I think a significant minority of Christians would understand what I'm saying. You can't live your life consciously trying to get into heaven. You

live your life as you *ought* to live it, without a view to the afterlife. That's the position I'm taking. Most of my Christian friends would tell me, "We don't worry about whether we're going to do well enough on our tests to get into the heavenly graduate school! We know what we should do, and now we try to live life to the full." I feel very empathetic to that.

I recently wrote another book, on war [*The Problem of War*, 2018]. When I grew up in England in the late 1940s and 50s, the First World War stuck out in our minds far more than did the Second. It defined our existence. The books I read in school, and the plays we did, were all about the First World War. The fact that both my great-grandfather and grandfather served in it made it very important to me, so I wrote a book on it for the centenary of the Armistice. In it, I looked at the 'killer ape' theory popular in the 1950s, which said that humans are warlike primarily because we evolved from apes that were warlike, and I discovered that, by and large, that's not believed anymore. We now realize the story is far

more complex. Going to war is rather a secondary characteristic of human beings. This brought home to me that humans are social rather than aggressive beings. This comes out in my final chapter of the present book, where I say there is a human nature, and our nature is to be social. But what does it mean to be social? Well, people have sex, have families and then we have communities. Communities involve communication at all levels. You and I are sitting here talking, and we aren't doing something weird! Art and human creativity are an extension of our sociality. When we're creative, it is in the context of our sociality. When we write, we write about other human beings. We paint other human beings. Music, too, is very much a social thing. Some people are playing and others listening. They're all social things. There are things that are natural to human beings; and the way to live your life is to live it as naturally as you can.

Some people may desire more than that, and they often ground it in the concept of an afterlife. You're suspicious of that in the book. What would you say to someone who finds meaning not just in social interactions, but in the concept of eternal life?

People do that, don't they? John Cottingham, whom I quote in the book, says exactly that: life is meaningless unless you have a theological substratum.

I grew up with that: that's the null position if you grow up in a Christian context. This life is transitory. How do you make sense of some people's lives being cut off short? Some people are born lucky, while others are not. I recently saw *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. I looked at Brad Pitt and said, "No one should be born that beautiful." Some people are born like that, and others are not. How do you make sense of all this? You make sense of it in a broader context where this life is transitory and we will be judged at the end of it. Then the fact that Anne Frank died at fifteen doesn't mean she didn't have a worthwhile life in the eyes of her Creator – especially when one compares it to Adolf Hitler, who lived three times her age.



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But what happens if you lose your faith? Do you revert to total hedonism? Eat, drink, and be merry? Go out and grab all you can? That seems to be the philosophy of Donald Trump. Get everything out of life you can. Yet does Trump seem the paradigm of a happy human being? Despite all the time he spends playing golf, anybody who talks and behaves in the way he does – spends so much of his time watching Fox News and sending out frenetic, hateful tweets about it... is this person truly happy? Absolutely not! And we all know people who are not terribly important people, or go-getters like Trump, but when you look at them, you say, “There’s really something about that person” – they’ve got a balanced attitude, take their job seriously, have a good family, and have hobbies.

This idea of meaning sounds very attractive. But what about people who are unlucky enough not to be able to experience a good family, a meaningful career, or have any intellectual stimulation? Can people in such circumstances find another meaning in life?

There’s no question that it’s an unequal world we live in. In America, the top 1% combined make more than the bottom 80% combined. But the world is America on a larger scale! We Westerners have more wealth than the entire rest of the world. I do worry about the current state of the world, especially poverty and the explosion in population, and how this will affect people’s ability to live optimal meaningful lives.

When it comes to morality, I really appreciate that you bite the bullet in denying objective moral values. As you state in the book, “My own opinion is that morality has no justification and can have no such justification” (p.139). With so many different ‘moralities’ competing for prominence, how would you, as a Darwinian existentialist, suggest someone find a meaningful morality?

Although there is a lot of relativism around, as a Darwinian I’d be very surprised if there wasn’t a bottom level reciprocal altruism operative for (almost) everyone. The philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) talked about various cultures that eat their children; but in no

society do people have children to fatten themselves up. Every society has various rules about children: incest taboos, and various other things. Also, certain levels of reciprocation *must* occur, otherwise you’d spend all your time fighting with others and would eventually break down as a human being.

In fact, human evolution has lost the very features that would destroy sociality. We’re not big and strong. We don’t have big teeth. We’re not that fast. The thing that always strikes me is concealed ovulation. So I think that, clearly, the human species has evolved characteristics that imply a certain level of sociality. How that pans out in society will be a function of a lot of different factors.

Also, significant number of moral changes occur, not because of the persuasive power of moral philosophers, but because of the advance of technology. When I was an undergraduate, only about a third of students were female. Now, it’s closer to 60%. Has this occurred because men have been made more sensitive to women’s aspirations? No! It occurred because of the invention of vacuum cleaners and washing machines and so on. Your grandmother would spend most of her days doing work around the house. It was simply what had to be done. Now we have machines that do most of this for us. To give you another example, think of sexual freedom. When I grew up in the 1950s, we were told that even the nicest boys only wanted one thing – which, of course, was true, even though they never got it. By the 1960s, even the nicest girls were out having sex. This didn’t mean morality had collapsed: it meant the pill had been invented! The threat of pregnancy was gone overnight. I think a lot of the abortion controversy in the US and elsewhere will also eventually be sidelined by the availability of morning-after pills. Moral change takes place because of advancing technology. Therefore, I fully expect different cultures, with different technologies, to have different morals and expectations. I’d ask, “What is the level of technological sophistication in this society? Is it a society where women are freed to live lives in ways similar to men, or one where women must do

‘women’s work’, like raising kids and helping with the farming?”

One final question: How do you see this work fitting into your overall corpus?

I don’t want to say that this book is my swan song, but I do feel that, at a certain level, I’m pulling it all together. The last decade has been my most creative. Philosophers are not mathematicians, and I think people working in the humanities need to get older to get the power and confidence of writing that years of heavy-duty study give them, so they can pull back a bit and look at things on a broader level. You’re not writing a dissertation with every book. I’ve mentioned a couple of my previous books; one on literature and one on war. I have found that sort of work on new topics tremendously rewarding. I had a great time writing another on *The Gaia Hypothesis* (2013) – going out to California and interviewing pagans, although I never got them to take their clothes off. (If you asked me “What are the big failures of your life?”, not being forced to interview pagans stark naked would be one of them.) In my late seventies it became clear that I’d need to retire soon – which I will next year – and that I needed to pull it all together. A good editor can really shape your project. I hadn’t realized how many books there are in philosophy on the meaning of life. My editor said, “I think you have something to say [about meaning], but I’m much more interested in your research and take on things rather than having you speak on what others have had to say.”

I feel very good about my career as it comes to an end. I think writing this book was very valuable, and a good thing. While I don’t want it to be my swan song, if that’s what it turns out to be, I wouldn’t be brokenhearted. I will be brokenhearted if I do not get to see and hear all three of the Mozart/da Ponte operas – *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan Tutte* – one more time. **PN**

• Seth Hart is a PhD student in theology at the University of Durham studying under the Durham Doctoral Studentship and focusing on the language and nature of purpose, function, and meaning in the field of biology.



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Fictive Questions, Real Answers

Rayyan Dabbous pieces together a fictional debate using real quotes from Donald Trump, POTUS, and Hannah Arendt, political philosopher.



Host: *What a pleasure to have both of you with us tonight, Dr Arendt, Mr Trump! We're discussing your controversial wall tonight, Mr President, and our producer has paired you with the philosopher Hannah Arendt, who is herself an immigrant, and yet has risen to become one of this country's most influential thinkers. Dr Arendt, why do you think Mr Trump here is so insistent about this wall deal?*

HA: Refugees and the stateless have attached themselves like a curse to *all* states on earth.¹

Host: *Is that right, Mr President? Do you deem anyone coming from the Mexican borders as a curse to our nation?*

DT: The *worst* elements in Mexico are being pushed into the United States by the Mexican government. The Border Patrol knows this. Tremendous infectious disease is pouring across the border.²

Host: *Do you share the President's panic?*

HA: Politically speaking, tribal nationalism always insists that its own people is surrounded by *a world of enemies, one against all*; that a fundamental difference exists between this people and all others.³

DT: There is no *global* anthem, no global currency, no certificate of global citizenship. We pledge allegiance to one flag, and that flag is the American flag. This country...⁴

HA (interrupting): ...is united neither by a heritage, nor by a memory, nor by a soil, nor by a language, nor by a common origin.⁵

DT: We *share* one heart, one home, and one glorious *destiny*. Making America great again.⁶

HA (Eyes rolling): There is hardly a better way to avoid discussion than by releasing an argument from the control of the *present* and by saying that only the *future* will reveal its merits.⁷

DT: You know what? You can take it any way you want.⁸

Host: *Not quite, Mr President! We are on a debate platform, after*

all. Let's find a common ground here. Dr Arendt, you're an immigrant yourself and you must possess experiences that surely the President would benefit from bearing. Was it hard assimilating as a Jew, when you first came here?

HA (Irritated): Would you kindly tell me just among what the Jews should assimilate here? Among the Irish? Among the English? Among the French? The Germans?... Whoever came here...?⁹

Host: *Your answer actually got the President to smile. Do you agree with Dr Arendt, Mr Trump?*

DT: Assimilation *has been* very hard. It's almost, I won't say nonexistent... but it gets to be very close.¹⁰

Host: *Dr Arendt, you're shaking your head?*

HA: There is no assimilation in a *culture*. The US is *not* a nation-state. There are no authentic natives here, except for the Indians. All the rest are citizens and they are united by one thing, that is a great one; one becomes a citizen by simple consent to the constitution. The constitution, that is, a simple scrap of paper. One can modify it, according to the French and German points of view.¹¹

DT: Europe? Look what's happening all over Europe... Europe is being absolutely swamped and destroyed.¹²

Host: *Do you suggest Europe gets a wall too, Mr Trump? Is taking in a flock of Syrian refugees the same as taking in a caravan of South American migrants?*

DT: [You mean] taking in tens of thousands of Syrian refugees who probably, in many cases... not *probably*... who are *definitely*, in many cases, ISIS-aligned.¹³

Host: *So the wall is a matter of security, too?*

DT: National security.¹⁴

Host: *Dr Arendt, any thoughts on that?*

HA: National security is a new word in the American vocabulary. *National security* now covers everything, all kinds of offenses.¹⁵

Host: *What kind of offenses, Hannah?*

HA (After a long pause): For example, the President has all rights. He is above the law. He can do no wrong. He is like a monarch in the republic, and whatever he does he does for the security of the nation.¹⁶

Host: *Now I get the pause. You must have thought Mr Trump would take your comment personally. Given, you know, a few allegations that –*

DT (Interrupting): Nobody takes things more personally than me.¹⁷ [But I agree, Hannah.] I have the absolute right to pardon myself.¹⁸

HA (Eyes rolling again): The chief qualification of a mass leader: he can never admit an error.¹⁹

Host: Tell us, Mr President, does anyone ever correct you at home? Melania, Ivanka? Who do you speak with most about conflicting ideas?

DT: I'm speaking with myself, number one, because I have a very good brain and I've said a lot of things... My primary consultant is myself.²⁰

Host: Hub... Isn't that a bit arrogant? What do you think, Dr Arendt?

HA: I don't know if it's *arrogance* simply. It is really the will to dominate, for heaven's sake! Until now, it has not yet dominated, just because we can sit here and still discuss this freely!²¹

DT (*Looking annoyed*): [Speaking of sitting] do you mind if I sit back a little? Because your breath is very bad.²²

Host: Someone's offended. That's it? Nothing else to talk about?

DT: I would like to talk but it seems to be very biased.²³

Host: What's biased?

DT: Ridiculous liberal bias.²⁴

HA: I hope that I don't shock you when I say that I'm not at all sure that I am a liberal. Not at all. I do not profess a political philosophy that I would be able to sum up with a term as an 'ism'.²⁵

Host: So Dr Arendt here wouldn't readily buy any of the fake news you're complaining about, Mr President! What's this problem with media authenticity, Dr Arendt? You're well-versed in propaganda.

HA: The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction and the distinction between true and false no longer exist.²⁶

Host: So are our journalists doing a bad job in making that distinction clear?

DT (*Raising a finger*): Sometimes journalist attacks have little to do with the pursuit of truth. They are personal vendettas disguised as objective reporting.²⁷

HA: No, no. It rests only on the conviction that each human being, as a thinking being, can form on his own judgments if he wants. What I don't know is how to give rise to this desire in him.²⁸

DT: Agreed. This very expensive global warming bullshit has got to stop! Our planet is freezing, record low temperatures, and our GW scientists are stuck in ice.²⁹

Host: I don't believe Hannah here shares your opinion on climate change... What do you think about this – don't mind the pun – heated topic?

HA: This may be irrelevant for the future of the world... it is not irrelevant for the future of man.³⁰

Host: What about the future of man? Aren't we responsible?

HA: You are young, [we are] old, but we are here together to leave them something...³¹

DT: Old? I am fortunate to have been blessed with great genes – both of my parents had very long and productive lives.³²

Host: And on that note, we close the show. It isn't that hard, talking with the other side, eh, Mr President?

DT: We got along very well, good chemistry. We're hugging. Everybody is happy.³³

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Rayyan Dabbous is a Lebanese author, playwright and director. Check out his documentary about Hannah Arendt's work, *In Search of the Last Agora*, and his political satire, *Syrians for Sale, Lebanese Style*.

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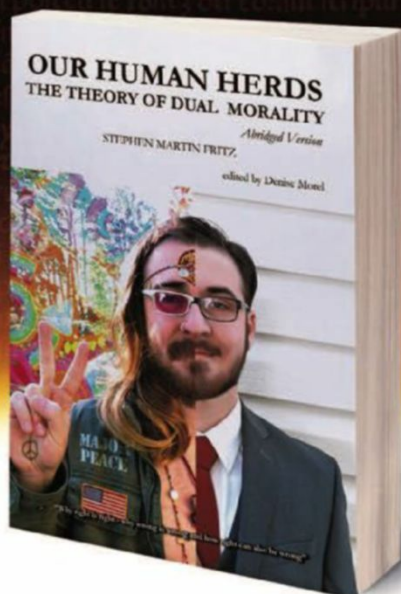
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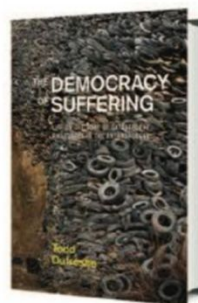
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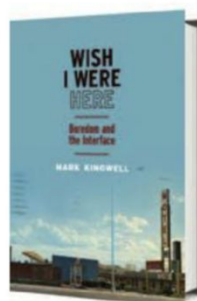


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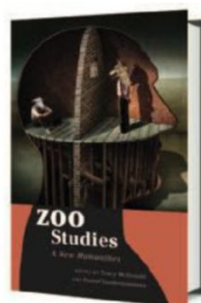
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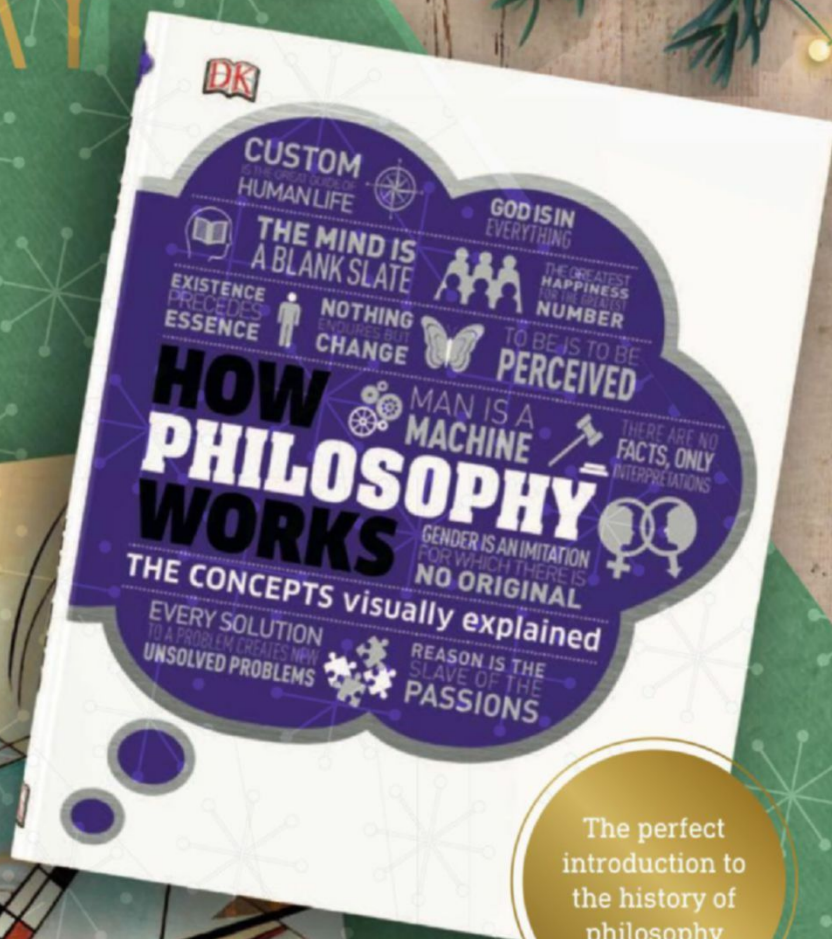


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